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THE

ROBERTSES

ON

THEIR TRAVELS

MRS. TROLLOPE.



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Ye wild goats sporting round the eagle's nest!
Ye eagles, playmates of the mountain storm!
Ye lightnings, the dread arrows of the clouds!
Ye signs and wonders of the elements!
Utter forth God! and fill the hills with praise!"

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WORLD IN LIGHT AND SHADE (THE); its Comicalities and Eccentricities. By A. W. COLE, Esq. With Six Illustrations.

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Revelations of a Nervous Man.	"The Man over the Way."
Snowed up, and its Results to Myself.	Confessions of a Middle-aged Gentleman.
A Race for an Heiress.	The Van to Hampton Court.
Mrs. Tibbutt's "Tea and Muffins."	The Crisis of my Existence.
Money to any Amount.	Mrs. Fitzmythe's "Novel"
A Suspicious Case.	Pic-nic, and its consequences.
A Warning to Uncles.	How I came to be Tried by a Court Marshal.
My Uncle's Will.	A Novel, in Three Chapters.
A Cure for Ennui.	A Month at Boulogne.
A Honeymoon on the Kaffir-Frontier.	

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ROBERTSES ON THEIR TRAVELS.

BY

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AUTHORESS OF "HARGRAVE" AND "THE THREE COUSINS."

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CHAPTER I.

A SCORE of reasons, at the very least, might easily be found to prove that it is a sin to make public any of the personal anecdotes and observations which we have all, more or less, the opportunity of making in private ; there is a sort of treachery in doing so that can admit of no excuse or defence whatever, and most justly does it deserve the universal reprobation which attends it. Far distant, however, from any such offence is the office performed by the moral satirist, who, looking upon his fellow-mortals with an observant eye, and perceiving such faults or follies, not only in an individual, but in a class, as he thinks within reach of being cured or checked by the wholesome touch of ridicule, exerts all the power he has in applying it. It is true, indeed, that in performing this office, he may occasionally be accused, by those who feel themselves galled, of having been guilty of PERSONALITY. But the answer to this accusation is too obvious to escape the dullest, even if an apt though homely proverb were less certain to suggest itself as a reply.

In recently looking over a miscellaneous collection of old travelling notes, made at various times, and in various lands, I found such constantly repeated expressions of regret and vexation at the effect produced on the minds of all foreigners by the strange, and often offensive manners of many among the multitudes of English travellers who thronged their cities, that I almost felt remorse at never having made public some of the offences and absurdities which had come under my own observation, and which tended to account for and justify the universal sentence of condemnation which has been passed upon English manners by every nation on the continent. Did I believe that the English people as a nation, or even the majority of them, merited the odium which has been thus cast upon them, I should certainly not occupy my pen upon a theme at once so useless and so distasteful ; but knowing, as I do, that such is not the fact, I am tempted to make an effort towards the reform of follies, which are not, as I conceive, of so hopeless a nature as to be given up as incurable. The mischief, for the most

part, arises from mere blunders and mistakes, which there is great reason to believe would be gladly avoided by those who fall into them, did they know a little better what they were about. Those who have travelled much, and still more, perhaps, those who have *resided* for a time in any of the continental capitals of Europe, must, I think, have observed how very much more conspicuous those English travellers, who are not of the most polished class of society, make themselves, than do those who are. Any one residing for a twelvemonth in Paris, for instance, who would direct a little attention to this point, would be sure to find that, whereas hundreds of highly educated and refined people come and go without ever exciting a remark, or drawing upon themselves any disagreeable attention whatever, persons less educated, or less refined, can scarcely show themselves in any place of public resort, without attracting both eyes and ears, in a manner that cannot fail to establish for the English nation exactly such a reputation for *mauvais ton* as at this moment attaches to them. And thus it happens, *of necessity*, that the better specimens of our travelling countrymen form no antidote, in the popular judgment of the countries they visit, to the worse. Could such persons but hear, as I have done, the observations of those before whom they perform these tricks of noisy and consequential impertinence, the evil would be soon cured; for there are few who would not willingly submit to some restraint, or, at any rate, to the same discipline of ordinary good breeding to which they yield themselves at home, rather than become the subject of remarks, often as good-natured as they are acute, and all tending to prove beyond the hope of a doubt, that the only delusion produced by their obtrusive swaggering is, that which causes them to be considered as the fair type of their countrymen, instead of a bad specimen of a small class.

But what makes this national judgment, both in France and elsewhere, the more provoking, is, that these very offenders are not a fair specimen even of themselves. How many respectable fathers and mothers, pretty daughters, and *learned* sons, have I seen "at church and market," at the theatre, and in the chamber of peers, at the king's court, and at a restaurant of forty sous, who, in all of these scenes, have assumed a sort of tone (*mauvais ton, sans contradiction*), as unlike as possible from what the very same persons would display in similar scenes at home. Sometimes I have been tempted to believe that such conduct arises from the unwonted lightness of spirit produced by the change of climate. On first breathing the clear bright atmosphere of France, almost every one seems to enjoy a sensation of *bien être* from its influence. The animal spirits rise. The customary restraints imposed by the manners and habits of home, and the check produced by the presence of familiar eyes being withdrawn, the gay travellers become fantastic first, and then impertinent, and, like children invited out without their gover-

ness, appear in the eyes of those they visit to have much worse manners than they ever exhibit at home.

It is impossible to witness this sort of display without mortification and regret, which is only increased by remembering how many amiable qualities, and how much genuine excellence, exist behind this provoking *chevaux-de-frise* of thoughtless folly.

It is said that a warning is better than an example ; and if so, there may be use in stringing together some of the recollections which bear upon this subject ; and setting them, from time to time, before the eyes of my dear *compatriots*, so many of whom are daily taking wing to visit foreign lands, in which they would find it infinitely more pleasant to be liked than disliked.

I beg to observe, however, that although I shall set nothing down which has not a fact for its foundation, I shall take especial care to avoid everything approaching to personality. Even my old note-book, as it lies in the original before me, might be read from the first page to the last, without throwing any light upon the questions, "Who?" and "Where?" The anecdotes stand isolated ; and although they may recal to me, freshly enough, places and persons alike distinct, I am quite sure that they could perform the same office to no one else, unless, indeed, it were the near and dear ones who were beside me when they occurred.

"I wish you joy, Mrs. Roberts," said a tall, well-looking man of fifty, entering his drawing-room in Baker-street, with rather a triumphant step ; "I wish you joy, madam. The arrangements respecting the disposal of the banking business are all concluded, and I am now a free man, and at liberty to indulge your long-cherished wish to visit the continent."

The lady he thus addressed was his wife ; she was of an age and appearance very suitable to his own, being about five years his junior, and having, like himself, the remains of considerable comeliness of feature. It is true that the lady was rather more *embonpoint* than she would have wished, and the carnation of her once fine complexion had deepened into a coarser tint ; nevertheless, she was still what many people would call a very fine looking woman, and in this judgment both herself and her husband joined.

"You have actually sold your share in the business, and been permitted to withdraw your share of the capital, Mr. Roberts?" demanded the lady, clasping her hands in an attitude of thanksgiving.

"I have actually sold my share of the business, and have excellent security for the price, as well as for my capital, and I am to receive four per cent. for the whole," he replied.

"Thank God!" exclaimed his wife very fervently; "and now then for the amount?"

"Why, my dear, it is a good bit less than it would have been, if you could have let me remain a few years longer in the business. However, I dare say we shall do very well, because of what you tell me about the cheapness of living abroad"—

"But what is it, Mr. Roberts? Pray don't beat about the bush in that way; you know I can't bear it."

"I won't beat about the bush, my dear; I have no thought of the kind; but if you don't give me time to speak, you know, I can't tell you. I reckon that we shall have altogether, with your railroad shares, and the interest from your brother upon the mortgage, just about seven hundred a-year."

"Seven, Mr. Roberts? Upon my life, I expected it would have been nearer seventeen. However, there is no need of your looking so terrified; I'll undertake to make seven hundred a-year abroad go as far as three times the sum at home. Just let me have the management of it, and you will see that it will do very well. But I hope you have not forgotten my positive injunctions about securing a sufficient sum of ready money to pay the expenses of the journey? Remember, sir, I will have no forestalling of the income. I must have *that* from the very first, perfectly clear and unencumbered."

"You know, my dear, that I never forget what you say. Nicholson has promised to advance me three hundred on the furniture of this house," replied Mr. Roberts.

"I would rather the sum had been five hundred, Mr. Roberts, a good deal rather. However, I am not going to find fault; altogether you have done very well; I only regret that I did not tell you to let me speak to Mr. Nicholson myself. But never mind, with my management I dare say I shall make it do."

"And about time, my dear," said her husband; "how soon do you think you should like to set off?"

"I must not be hurried, Mr. Roberts. I have a great deal to do, an immense deal to do, and all I can say is, that you may depend upon it I shall get through it all in about half the time that anybody else would take. In the first place, you know, I have got to give notice to Edward that he is to leave Oxford immediately."

"God bless my soul, Mrs. Roberts, I never heard you say anything about that before," exclaimed her husband, the startled blood mounting to his temples and his ears; "don't you intend to let him stay at Oxford till he has taken his degree?"

"Most decidedly not, Mr. Roberts," she replied. "If you knew a little better what you were talking about you would not ask such a question. Edward, with his extraordinary talents, has already

had a great deal more time than was necessary for acquiring as much Greek and Latin as anybody can want who is not intended for a schoolmaster, and I certainly do not mean that he shall lose any more time at it. Modern languages and waltzing will render him as nearly perfect as it is within the reach of human nature to be. Say no more about his remaining at Oxford, if you please, for I feel it would irritate me."

Thus warned, Mr. Roberts attempted no further remonstrance on the subject, but pulled out his pocket handkerchief, blew his nose, and remained silent.

"There, my dear, that will do now," said the lady, waving her hand; "I need not detain you any longer, and I have myself many things to do more profitable than talking."

"I will go this moment, my dear," replied her husband; "only I should like to know first how soon you think of setting off?"

"My dear Mr. Roberts, I must insist upon it that you do not persecute me any more with that question. Depend upon it you shall know in time to get yourself ready to accompany me. All you have to do at present is to get the money from Mr. Nicholson, and let me have it; and little enough it will be, certainly; but I shall buy nothing till we get to Paris, and I must insist upon it that you implicitly comply with my wishes in this respect. I would not see you in an English coat or hat in Paris for more than I'll say. There now, go, my dear, and let me have leisure to think a little." This conversation was followed by such a degree of activity on the part of Mrs. Roberts, that in less than a fortnight from the time it took place, herself and her whole family, consisting of her husband, her son, and her two daughters, were all safely stowed on board the Boulogne steam-boat, and careering down the Thames.

Of the younger branches of the Roberts family it will be necessary to say a few words before they are launched upon the ocean of Parisian gaiety, in order to show distinctly the effect which it produced upon them. The son was a slight, small-featured young man of twenty, certainly not ugly, for he resembled both his parents, and both were well looking; but in him regularity of feature was almost a defect, for there was a preciseness of outline in nose, mouth, and chin, which, together with his carefully arranged hair, gave him a strong resemblance (though rather upon a small scale) to one of the pretty waxen young gentlemen exhibited in the window of a hair-dresser's shop. The young ladies were also very tolerably pretty; Miss Agatha, the eldest, being light haired, with a pretty mouth and brilliant complexion; and Miss Maria, the youngest, more fortunate still, from being tall and well made, with a profusion of dark chestnut curls, and a very handsome pair of eyes. In short, the three young

people formed a group of which their papa and mamma were exceedingly proud.

As Mrs. Roberts's chief object was to ensure for herself and her family the inestimable advantages of superior society, it will readily be imagined that she had inculcated her views and principles on the minds of her children, and she had for years enjoyed the inexpressible gratification of perceiving that there was not one of them whose young spirit did not kindle at her lessons; so that the path before her, important as it was, seemed really strewn with flowers.

As soon as they reached the deck of the steamboat Mrs. Roberts took the arm of her husband, and walked with great dignity to a seat which she considered to be the best on board, signifying to her son and daughters that they were to place themselves on a bench opposite. Their only travelling attendant was a tall footman in a showy livery, and as soon as the party was seated he was ordered to seek footstools for the three ladies. Just as he had succeeded in obeying this command, two quiet-looking girls, in dresses which had nothing to recommend them save their being particularly well adapted for the scene and the season, placed themselves on the same bench with the Misses Roberts and their brother; but in the next moment they were all disturbed by the approach of two or three men employed in putting up an awning. "Take care of your head," cried one of the plainly-dressed young strangers, addressing Miss Roberts, who profited by the warning without acknowledging it, and in a few minutes the awning was arranged, and the party restored to the quiet possession of their seats.

"What a comfort!" exclaimed the same young lady addressing Miss Roberts, looking, as she did so, too full of youth and enjoyment to be aware of the immense liberty she was taking with a young lady so elegantly dressed as to be much more fit for a drive in the Park than a voyage on the Thames. But whatever sensations of happiness Miss Roberts might feel, they were not of a nature so completely to overcome all her preconceived notions of what she owed to herself, as to induce her to reply in any way to the unauthorised familiarity of her neighbour, neither did she turn her eyes towards her, but looking straight forward, exchanged a glance with her mamma, which very eloquently expressed all the annoyance she experienced at being exposed to a liberty so every way unauthorised.

"This will never do," said Mrs. Roberts, knitting her brows, and shaking her head with a look of mingled alarm and indignation. "Mr. Roberts," she added, "I must really beg you to change places with my daughters, I can easily make room for them both;" and, lowering her voice a very little, "It will be quite a different thing if you and Edward are attacked."

The proposed change was instantly made, and the young ladies

placed themselves one on either side of their mamma, with the happy look of recovered security, which an escape from danger naturally inspires. But the young ladies, in their hurry to escape from the freedom of manner which had so greatly annoyed them, had left their footstools behind, and one of the cotton-robed young ladies, though with a very innocent and unconscious look, almost immediately placed a foot upon one of them; Mrs. Roberts seemed greatly agitated.

"I really do wish," she said, with every appearance of being deeply in earnest, "I really do wish that they would make the steamboats on a different plan. The division between deck and cabin passengers is by no means sufficient. Now that all sorts and kinds of people go abroad, there really ought to be some means of dividing them a little into classes." "I am sure so do I," said Agatha. "A capital idea, mamma! I wish you would set it going," added Maria.

"My dear Edward," said Mrs. Roberts, "I am excessively sorry to disturb you; for, happy creature, you really look as if you were going to sleep, but I really must trouble you to call Stephen here."

The young man obeyed, and the tall footman again made his appearance.

"You must contrive to get us more footstools, Stephen," said his mistress, with sufficient distinctness to have been heard almost from the helm to the head of the vessel.

"I don't think I can get any more, ma'am," said the man; "for I have seen every one that was laid up in the heap carried away."

The young offender on the opposite bench immediately withdrew her feet, at the same time pushing forward the footstool, and making a slight action with her head, as she looked at the servant, to indicate that he was at liberty to remove it. The man did so, and placed it beneath the feet of Miss Agatha.

"You must contrive to find another, Stephen," resumed Mrs. Roberts, in her most decided tone. "Miss Maria cannot sit without a footstool."

The two young girls, who had innocently been the cause of all this trouble, were either unconscious that their dresses concealed the wished-for accommodation, or thought that they had better not intrude any further civility upon their elegant fellow-travellers. Perhaps they began to feel not quite at their ease, for the beaming gaiety of their bright young faces seemed a little overcast, and instead of continuing to converse together concerning the fortunate fineness of the weather, and the like, they both seemed occupied in looking about the deck, as if in search for some one they expected to see there. Nor did they, as it seemed, look in vain, for in the next moment they both sprung up together, and darted away to meet a gentleman, who, from his age and the manner in which he

smilingly received one under each arm, proclaimed himself unmistakeably to be their father. The very instant that their removal restored the coveted footstool to sight, Mrs. Roberts extended her own hand to seize upon it, exclaiming as she did so, "How extremely disagreeable it is to meet with underbred people!"

This sentiment was very cordially echoed by her daughters, upon which Mrs. Roberts took occasion to observe, that in the new mode of life which was now opening before them, they would find it highly necessary to assume and sustain a tone of manners differing very essentially from what was either necessary or desirable at home.

"And the reason for this," she continued, "is very obvious; while people remain in their own country, everybody about them knows who and what they are, and there is neither good nor harm to be got by letting all that sort of thing take its course; but it is plain to see that when travelling abroad, a very different line of conduct becomes necessary. It is most probable, you know, that everybody we meet will be strangers to us, and I should like to know how they are to find out that we are something above the common herd, unless we take care to make them feel it and know it by a little dignity and high spirit in our manner of going on? This must, of course, be equally necessary towards foreigners and English, and I beg to observe to you all, that it must never be lost sight of. I am quite certain that we are now in a situation to choose our own position in society, and this, it is very certain, that we never were before. Everybody, you know, says that one pound on the continent will go as far as five in England, and we therefore have quite enough to place us in the very highest society, if we take care to conduct ourselves properly. Nor is this, I beg to observe, the only reason why it is necessary to behave so as give ourselves consequence in the eyes of those around us. Though a great many people of fashion come abroad, it is only too certain that a great many others come also; and just think what a business we should make of it, if, instead of keeping amongst the very highest set, as I hope and intend, we should any of us run up an intimacy with a parcel of people actually inferior, perhaps, to any that we should choose to speak to at home!"

The whole party, father, daughters, and son, listened to this harangue with the most earnest attention, and it was very evident, from the observations which fell from them in reply, that they one and all fully appreciated the justness of her reasoning.

"Well, thank God!" she said, after having listened to them all in turn, "I don't believe I have any fools to deal with amongst you, and that is an immense comfort when there is an important object in view. In fact, I know that we all think and feel pretty much alike as to the manner in which we should choose to go on; but as to the means, I know perfectly well that you must trust to

me—and I am happy to say that you may do this safely, for, depend upon it, I shall forget nothing. That letter now, for instance, to the embassy—who but I would have ever thought of making use of our good apothecary in such a business? But I will bet you what you please that we shall find Lady Carlton's letter quite as effectual as if she had written it to please the first duke in the land? Don't I know that an apothecary, as clever as Tomlinson is with children, may get what he likes from the parents, if he does but know how to ask for it?"

"It was a capital good thought of yours, my dear," said Mr. Roberts; "I am sure it would never come into my head, if I had studied where to get an introduction for a hundred years."

"Upon my soul, you are first-rate, ma'am," added Mr. Edward, as he reconnoitred through a glass the different groups that occupied the deck; "but do you think, ma'am, there would be any indecorum in our moving about a little? I think we look rather musty-fusty sitting here altogether, as if we were afraid of all the people."

"Afraid of them in one sense, my dear Edward, it is very necessary we should be, as you must have perceived yourself, since we came on board; but that is no reason why we should not walk about, if we like it. We can take care of ourselves, you know, whether we move, or remain stationary. If you will give me your arm, Mr. Roberts, I will take a turn or two upon the deck; but you must call Stephen here first, Edward, that he may take charge of the footstools till we sit down again."

The tall footman having had the footstools committed to his charge, the party set off, the father and mother in front, and the son and daughters following; but although thus divided, they contrived to converse together, exchanging many keen and clever observations upon their fellow-passengers, the nature of which might be guessed at, perhaps, by the frequent laughter of the party, although all they said to each other was very decorously uttered in whispers. Having thus amused themselves for about half an hour, the ladies declared their wish of sitting down again; but as they approached the places they had before occupied, they perceived, to their extreme surprise and indignation, that they were occupied by the very identical cotton dresses which had already proved so particularly distasteful. Mrs. Roberts felt exceedingly angry with those very presumptuous young people; she knew, however, perfectly well (for a river steamboat was no new scene to her) that she had no right to reclaim the seat, and she therefore contented herself by preparing to brush past it, with the words "bore," "public conveyances," and "vulgar people," on her lips. But the sharp eyes of Miss Maria descried something in the appearance of the two gentlemen who were now the companions of their obnoxious fellow-passengers which led her to doubt

whether, notwithstanding their "horribly common gowns," they might not be very different sort of people from what she had first supposed.

"Mamma—mamma," she whispered, at the same time restraining her mother's steps by a little gentle violence. "Don't go on in that way till you know what sort of people they are. Just look at the gentlemen who are with them."

Mrs. Roberts did look at the gentlemen, and her state of mind underwent an immediate change. She returned the pressure of the arm which had seized upon hers, in token that she comprehended what the pressure meant, and returned the whisper by saying in the same tone, or one lower still, "Never mind—I will set it all right again. The girls seemed vastly inclined to be sociable." And then, taking a step back, she pointed out some object on the bank of the river to Maria and her brother, and having led them to the side of the vessel, said, "I suspect we were wrong about those shabby-looking girls—look at the men they have got with them. Follow me, and behave just as I do, that's all."

She then pursued her way to the seat they had previously occupied, and having reached it seemed suddenly to perceive for the first time that it was fully occupied. The youngest of the two girls now seated there looked a little frightened, and, exchanging a glance with her sister, made a movement as if she was about to rise.

"Not for the world, my dear young lady," exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, with a courteous smile. "But I am afraid you will not find that high seat comfortable without footstools."

And stepping briskly back towards the place where her servant was still keeping guard over the monopolized treasures, she made a sign to him to advance, and then with her own hands placed two of the stools he brought beneath the feet of the two young girls. This was done with a smile of such gay good humour that it was impossible not to receive it graciously, and, considering the texture of their dresses, the two young ladies acquitted themselves very well. But the reward which Mrs. Roberts anticipated and received was from the gentlemen of the party, who both immediately rose, and offered their places to the civil lady and her daughters. Mrs. Roberts immediately sat down, nodding to her children, and waving them off to the opposite bench, saying with much earnestness to the elder of the two gentlemen, who was, as she divined, the father of the younger, as well as of the cotton-gowns, "Pray, do not let us disturb you, sir."

The two Miss Robertses were really pretty-looking girls, and the young man, whose place their mother had taken, seemed perfectly willing to content himself with the accommodation offered by the seat against the side of the vessel, on which they and their brother had placed themselves—Mr. Roberts having wan-

dered away in search of the gentleman's cabin, and a newspaper.

It is always to be lamented when pretty-looking girls give themselves airs, and grow disagreeable, only because they know themselves to be charming. A perfectly high bred and well-educated woman charms by *being* elegant, not by exerting all her faculties to *appear* so ; and in like manner a beautiful coquette of the same class is irresistible, because she endangers not the grace which is born of ease, by struggling to appear something that she is not. If Agatha and Maria Roberts could have learned to "*let themselves alone*," they might have appeared in every drawing-room in Europe with almost a certainty of being more admired than one-half the women they met ; but this they had not learned, and the consequence was now, as it had often been before, and as it was likely often to be again, that the young man who had speedily entered into conversation with them as speedily got tired, and after listening with smiling attention first to one, and then to the other, as they laboured to set themselves off in a variety of ways, he at length got up, and proposed to his father that they should walk to the head of the ship to look out for—what they were to look out for his father did not wait to hear—for he, too, had been almost overwhelmed by the obliging efforts of Mrs. Roberts to enchant him ; and telling his daughters that he would come back to them soon, he took his son's arm, and walked off.

It boots not to relate all the strenuous efforts made by Mrs. Roberts to obliterate from the memory of the two young ladies who were left seated beside her, all recollection of her former demeanour towards them. Suffice it to say, that, like some generals, more able than successful, she piqued herself as much upon the skill with which she could perform a backward movement whenever she happened to get into a scrape, as upon the spirited boldness with which her manœuvres in advance were ever made. In the present case, however, she produced considerably less impression in both movements, than she would have been easily persuaded to believe possible ; but, in fact, the two young people who had unintentionally attracted so much of her attention, were too giddily delighted, and too youthfully light-hearted, to know or to care very much what these bustling strangers thought about them. Had they been obliged to pronounce an opinion concerning them, it would probably have been worded in the phrase, "odd sort of people." But in truth they were forgotten even before they were lost sight of ; for the terrible moment being arrived at which the peaceable river changed into the cruel sea, all hopes, fears, joys, sorrows, plots, and counterplots were alike forgotten by every female on board ; and by the time the vessel reached Boulogne, the first and only thought of each was, how to get out of her as quickly as possible.

To persons who, like the Roberts family, have just felt the myste-

rious malady of the sea for the first time, there is something equally astonishing and delightful in the sudden relief from their misery, which follows the very first contact of their feet with *terra firma*, and they all felt it in a degree that made their first continental sensations very delightful indeed. Their walk along the pier seemed to them all the most agreeable promenade they had ever enjoyed, and even the clamorous applications for their company with which they were greeted on the quay by the envoys of all the hotels in the town, produced more pleasure than annoyance.

"I have always heard that the French people were the most intelligent in the world," observed Mrs. Roberts; "and how remarkable a proof of it is their having picked us out in this manner among such a motley crowd. Look here! I have had six cards from as many different hotels put into my hand already!"

"And how in the world are we to choose among them, my dear?" inquired Mr. Roberts. "I really should like to find myself in a comfortable hotel with as little delay as possible. Have you made up your mind as to which card you like best?"

"Trust to me, Mr. Roberts," replied his wife, with her usual air of knowing perfectly well what she was about. "I certainly shall not be decided in my choice by the appearance of the cards. But we will follow that well-looking young man, if you please, in the green coat and silver buttons. I perceive he speaks English perfectly. *Oui, monsieur, vous, oui, vous,*" she continued, speaking very loud, to assist the intelligence of the green-coated commis-sionaire. "I don't mind about the English myself, but it will be pleasant for you and Edward," she added; and then again addressing the man whom she had selected, she said, "It is *votre* hotel you know that we are going to—and *votre maître*, I suppose, can tell us tout about our luggage and the *do—do*—what in the world is the name of a French custom-house, Agatha?"

"*Douane, mamma,*" answered the young lady, whose recent French studies had gone considerably farther than her own; although Mrs. Roberts herself had not set out upon this important expedition without having very sedulously applied herself to the same study. "German and Italian," she had said, "I intend to learn when I get into the respective countries, but it is absolutely necessary to have a stock of French to set off with."

During the domestic practising which had gone on for several weeks previous to their setting off, both her daughters, fresh from the grammatical discipline of a French teacher, had endeavoured to impress upon their mamma the necessity of paying a little more attention both to verbs and genders, but her answer was characteristic and decisive. "My dear children, it is perfectly right and proper that you should study the grammar; it is a study properly befitting your years. All young people learn grammar; but scholars of my age must take a more enlarged and general view of

the language. You know how steadily I have applied to reading dialogues and vocabularies, not to mention that I have transcribed whole columns from the dictionary, and I declare to you, girls, that I am often astonished at my own quickness in learning. I assure you that of late I hardly ever go into a shop without making use of French words without intending it. When I bought my last new bonnet I asked the woman, quite without thinking of it, to show me some *bonnets de paille*."

"But *bonnet* means *cap*, mamma, in French," had been Miss Agatha's reply; and, "Nonsense, child," her resolute mother's rejoinder.

"When the niceties of grammar are required," she added, "all the rules I mean, and the exceptions, and the rest of it, as in writing notes, for instance, of course I shall employ you and your sister; but in the matter of talking I don't expect to want your assistance at all. When there is anything to be *said*, I always feel as if I were inspired; words, thank God! never fail me, and I do believe I could soon talk in almost any language in the world except Greek and Latin."

But to return to the crowded spot on which we left her haranguing at Boulogne. Long before she could repeat the word *douane* after her daughter, the accomplished commissionaire from the Hotel d'Angleterre had assured her, in very excellent English, that if she would be pleased to proceed to the hotel they should have their night-bags in ten minutes, and the rest of their baggage before they were up in the morning; provided madame would be pleased to give him all the keys. On hearing this demand, the countenance of Mrs. Roberts displayed a world of acute intelligence, and with a nod and a smile she replied, "Thank you, *mon ami*. Mercy, mercy, my good friend. There is no occasion to put all that trouble upon you, *pas du tout*. *Voilà* that gentleman, my husband, he will go to the *douane* with the keys, and look after the baggage himself."

The commissionaire did not remonstrate, but with a civil smile desired that they would please to follow him, and a few minutes' walking brought them to the hotel. "I am as hungry as a hound," said Mr. Roberts, as he entered it; "and I hope, my dear, that you mean to order something more substantial than tea and bread and butter." "Oh! goodness, I hope so!" "I am sure I shall die, if you don't." "I could devour half-a-dozen pounds of beef-steaks," chimed in the two young ladies and their brother.

"I am quite in the same condition myself," replied the ruling spirit of the party. "*Il faut ordre du souper*."

"*Commander*, mamma," whispered Agatha.

"Of course, child, I shall command whatever I want," replied Mrs. Roberts, rather impatiently; and then, having at last condescended to profit by the English of a waiter who came to receive

her instructions, she ordered the most substantial repast that could be prepared in half-an-hour, the whole party declaring that they could not possibly exist without food for a longer time.

And then came a *fille de chambre* to enquire if the ladies would like to see their rooms. They followed her up stairs, complaining a good deal as they went of the inferiority of the house in appearance to an English hotel, and particularly in the want of stair-carpets. The coloured petticoat, short jacket, and round-eared cap of their conductress also elicited a good many observations from the young ladies; upon which Mrs. Roberts said, "I don't wonder, girls, at your being amused by the queer look of everything, and as long as you do nothing but laugh it is very well; but remember I shall be monstrous angry if I hear any of you grumble; because the real truth is, that one of the great advantages which English people are sure to find in coming abroad, arises from their being themselves so every way superior. Depend upon it, the natives are not altogether such fools as not to perceive this, and that, as I take it, is the principal reason why all the English that come abroad get up so much higher in society than those who stay at home."

The first examination of the sleeping accommodation was by no means satisfactory to the ladies of the Roberts family, for their inexperienced eyes did not discern in the pile of what they indignantly termed "nothing but mattresses," the most perfect sleeping apparatus in the world. "Do ask her, Agatha, if they have no better rooms, with feather beds in them," said Mrs. Roberts, with such a frown upon her brow as might have frightened a chamber-maid less used to the *exigeance* of new English travellers than was their present black-eyed conductress.

"Ces sont de fort bons lits," she quickly replied to the remonstrance of Miss Agatha.

"Et vous n'avons pas des plus beaux chambres?" demanded Mrs. Roberts, still frowning.

"Non, madame," replied the girl, with that stoical indifference to her queer French which seems so universally to preclude the possibility of a laugh among our polite neighbours.

"Il faut que vous sâit," resumed Mrs. Roberts, "que nous suis accoutumés à avoir la meilleur de tout les choses quand nous suis au logis."

"Oui, madame," replied the girl, without moving a muscle.

"It is no good, mamma, to talk any more to her—she's a fool," said Miss Maria. "But I wish you would tell me how long we are to be without our carpet bags. Just look at my hair! I am in perfect misery for want of a comb! And do see, there is not a morsel of soap to wash our hands. When are we to have our carpet-bags, mamma?"

"How in the world can I tell, Maria?" replied her mother.

"The man that brought us here said ten minutes; but I fancy we must never believe a word they say to us. They are a horrible set of liars, you may depend upon it."

"But we must get the carpet-bags somehow or other, mamma," said Agatha. "Do let us go down stairs, will you, to inquire about them?"

And down stairs again they went, Mrs. Roberts talking exceedingly loud the whole time, concerning the dreadful inferiority of the French to the English nation in all respects; which, considering that the language in which she spoke was considerably more likely to be understood than her French had been, was both imprudent and uncivil, to say the least of it.

On entering the large *salle à manger*, where a servant was preparing a part of the table for their supper, Mrs. Roberts attacked him in her piebald jargon, with inquiries concerning the greatly wanted carpet bags. The man, with the uniform civility of his class, strained every faculty to understand her; and when at length she fortunately substituted the words "carpet-bags" for "*bags de tapis*," he caught her meaning, and replied that if she had left her bags with their commissionaire, *à coup sur*, she would have them in a few minutes.

"What does he say about *coosin*?" demanded Mrs. Roberts, addressing her eldest daughter. "Who is coosin? What stupid plagues they are!"

Miss Agatha explained very distinctly what the man had said, and then replied to it by telling him that they had *not* left their keys; upon which, with all possible civility, the man told her that there was not the slightest chance that their bags would be sent to them at all.

"Do you hear him, mamma?" exclaimed both the girls at once. "Good Heaven! what are we to do?"

"Do?" returned Mrs. Roberts, looking exceedingly angry. "Why, of course your father must go this moment to the custom-house with the keys. What a shame it is to keep one's things from one in such an abominable manner! Pretty sort of freedom, isn't it? But you must go, my dear, this very moment, you must, indeed, for I shall want to go to bed the very instant I have supped, and I leave you to guess if I can go to bed without my night-bag, Mr. Roberts."

"No, my dear," replied her husband, "I dare say you can't—only I should be very glad if I could get a morsel to eat first, for I really do feel quite exhausted."

"Very well, Mr. Roberts, then you must eat, of course, and I must go. I wonder if I shall find Stephen too exhausted to go with me?"

"That's talking quite wild, my dear," returned her husband, taking up his hat and stick and preparing to depart; "I didn't

mean, I am sure, to put anything off upon you ; but I must have somebody to show me the way, and, after all, I am afraid I shall make but a bad hand of it, seeing that I don't understand one word of French."

"Good gracious, Mr. Roberts ! How you do love to make difficulties ! Of course the people will speak English at the custom-house. All you have to do is just to take Stephen with you to bring the bags, and to get a lad to show you the way. Give your keys, girls—and yours, Edward—here's mine—I dare say you will be back before the supper is ready. Taking Stephen will make a difference, you may depend upon it ; there was nobody on board that had such a stylish servant, and you may be sure that when they see he belongs to you, our business will be attended to first. It is the way of the world, my dear, take my word for it."

As she spoke, Mrs. Roberts rang the bell ; Stephen was summoned, and a man found to show the way.

"Now then," said she, "make haste, there's a good man, and I'll take care you shall have a good supper when you come back again."

Either poor Mr. Roberts was unskilful in the performance of his task, or the appearance of Stephen produced a less imposing effect than his mistress expected, for the very last bags examined were those of the Roberts family. It is possible, indeed, that the circumstance of their being the only ones left to the care of the owners, without any patronizing assistance from an hotel commissionaire, might be the cause of this ; but certain it is, that instead of coming back directly, the unfortunate Mr. Roberts did not make his appearance for nearly two hours. The worthy man sighed when he found that his family had finished their repast, and the remnants of the supper which were brought back to him might have been eaten, perhaps, with more relish had not the weary ladies each seized upon a bag the instant they greeted their longing eyes, declaring that they could not remain up an instant longer to obtain the universe.

Here is one fytte of *Robert's* pilgrimage ;
 Ye who of him may further seek to know,
 Shall find some tidings in a future page,
 If he that writeth now may scribble moe.

CHAPTER II.

"AND here we are, then ! actually in Paris ! and in a very tolerably decent-looking hotel, too," exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, looking round with great complacency upon the mirrors, alabasters, and ormolu, which adorned the room. "And I must say that from first to last I do think I have managed better than most people could

have done. Here we are all just as gay and as fresh as the morning we set out, without a single packet stolen or lost, and without one disagreeable accident, excepting, indeed, the absurd whim of that fool, Stephen, taking it into his head that he must go home again because he could not get porter. That's the only disagreeable thing that has happened to us, isn't it?"

"And I don't call that disagreeable at all, my dear," replied her husband. "Depend upon it we shall do very well without him. And you have brought us to a very beautiful room, that is certain, Mrs. Roberts. And now, my dear, what are we to do next?"

"The first thing that I shall do will be to change my dress, and take a walk in these lovely Tuileries gardens," said the young Mr. Roberts.

"Why should not we go too, mamma?" demanded her eldest daughter. "The day is so very lovely that it would be a shame to lose it."

"I delight in your eagerness, my dear love, to enjoy the charming scenes to which I have brought you; for even the day is as much French as the Tuileries themselves. I knew very well what I was about, didn't I? But as to our all setting off to show ourselves in the gardens of the Tuileries before we have bought a single thing, or even unpacked what we have brought with us, I can't say that I think it a good plan at all. If we had Stephen with us, indeed, to walk behind you, it would not signify so much; but if I were Edward, I positively would not take you out in your travelling bonnets; they were very pretty when you set out, but they are a good deal the worse for the wear, I can tell you."

"Then what *are* we to do first, my dear?" demanded Mr. Roberts, a little fretfully. "This is a very gay-looking room to be sure, and it has got a very pretty look-out; but that's no reason why we should sit up here all day with our hands before us."

"If you begin to grumble, Mr. Roberts, I give the thing up altogether. It is too bad, exerting myself as I do for you all, that I should be reproached so very bitterly because the things can't be unpacked the very moment we arrive! I must see the master or mistress of the house. Perhaps it will be better to see both of them; and when I have asked them all particulars respecting the rent of their rooms by the month, or perhaps by the year, I shall be able to decide whether it will be better to remain here, or immediately seek for private lodgings. Ring the bell, Mr. Roberts, if you please. Everything is so excessively cheap in France, that I dare say we shall find that we can very well afford to live at this comfortable hotel, if we like it."

"Ring the bell, Mr. Roberts, if you please." He did so, and after the interval of, what appeared to the impatient party, many minutes, a waiter answered the summons. "*Vous êtes une ser-*

vante, je crois ?" said Mrs. Roberts, interrogatively—"seulement une servante ?"

It is very rarely indeed that a French man or a French woman either is seen to laugh at the blunders made by foreigners when attempting to speak their language ; however much their pretty idiom, of which they are justly proud, may be spoken "*à la vache espagnole*," they contrive with admirable politeness, and most extraordinary command of muscle, to give no indication whatever of the amusement occasioned thereby. But the unfortunate waiter now addressed by Mrs. Roberts was not proof against this attack upon his dignity of sex, and, in spite of all his efforts, he showed his teeth from ear to ear as he answered, "Pardon, madame, je suis un garçon."

"What does the idiot mean ?" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, with great indignation. "A boy indeed ! Great fool ! J'ai besoin de votre maître, et de votre maîtresse. Ditez à eux de monter l'escalier à me parler."

"Oui, madame," said the man, hurrying out of the room with a perturbation of feature which, if displayed before his employers, would have very properly ensured his instant dismissal, as proving him utterly unfit for the situation of waiter at an hotel depending principally on English travellers. The mission with which he was charged was so far successful that it brought the mistress of the mansion to the presence of Mrs. Roberts. We will not follow the dialogue which ensued through all its verbal *niceties* ; it is sufficient to say, that by the help of Miss Agatha it at length became evident to her mamma that their present gay abode must be exchanged for one considerably less costly, and that the sooner the movement was made the better chance there would be of her finding herself able to keep her often pledged promise, of living in an elegant style without running the slightest risk of exceeding their income. She dismissed the elegant landlady, therefore, with a very magnificent sort of nod, and the words "Je veux penseray, madame, a tout cela."

Mrs. Roberts would not have confessed the fact for much, but the truth is, that for a few moments she felt considerably at a loss as to what she *ought* to do next. To have asked the opinion of her husband would have been a sort of domestic innovation exceedingly unpalatable, and perhaps dangerous ; but, after a little reflection, she very cleverly hit upon a tone of general consultation which, without the slightest degradation, gave her the amiable appearance of wishing to please everybody. "Now, then," she said, with a gay and good-humoured smile, "now then, let us put it to the vote. What are we to do next, in order to settle ourselves permanently in the most agreeable manner ? I am quite ready to hear everybody's opinion ; only observing, before any of you begin to speak, that I will *not* consent to stay here beyond one night. I

believe I am pretty quick in finding out people's characters, and I will venture to say that the woman who has just left the room is one of the most audacious and unprincipled cheats that ever trod the earth. Now, then, give me all your opinions, what must we do next?"

No one seemed in haste to answer the question so condescendingly put; but after the pause of a minute or two, both the young ladies spoke at the same moment,—the eldest saying, "I am sure I don't know;" and the youngest "I am sure I can't tell." The father of the family took still longer to reflect before he spoke, but then there was something like a valuable hint in what he said.

"I wonder, my dear, if there are any such things as advertisements in Paris?" were the words he slowly and rather timidly uttered, by no means certain that he should not be chid for an absurdity.

"Certainly, my dear, there are advertisements, you may be very sure of that, but the worst of it is, you see, that we do not exactly know where to look for them. But where there is a will, you know, there is always a way," and Mrs. Roberts again rang the bell.

It was now an older man who answered it, and one who probably thought himself proof against any French the lady could speak; but although his gravity was in no degree endangered, even this experienced personage felt puzzled when she said, "*Avez-vous aucun papier de nouvelles dans la maison?*"

"Journal, mamma," whispered Agatha.

"Nonsense, child! how can you fancy such a fellow as this keeps a journal? Or, if he did, what should I want with it?" said her mother sharply. But, luckily for the business in hand, the quick Frenchman had caught the word, and before Mrs. Roberts ceased speaking, he had left the room. His return was almost as rapid as his exit, and, greatly to the satisfaction of the party, he brought several newspapers in his hand. Though unconscious of the value of the universal compendium which she seized upon, Mrs. Roberts instantly took possession of "*Galignani*," the English title at once attracting her eye, civilly pushing across the table to her husband half-a-dozen French papers, unmindful of, or indifferent to, the fact that he could not read them. There was equal cleverness in the rapidity with which, at a glance, Mrs. Roberts perceived the invaluable nature of the publication she held in her hand, and in the manner with which she concealed her joy at the discovery, under the semblance of indifference.

"After all, my dear, I think the best thing we can do will be to set off, just in our travelling dresses as we are, and look at some lodgings;" and as she spoke she rolled up the precious paper and put it into her bag. "Come then, girls! I suppose you will like to come too? Let us go and put our bonnets on." While thus employed in the sanctuary of her own apartment, it occurred to

Mrs. Roberts that it would be impossible for her, without a guide, to find out the different streets referred to in the advertisements; and, taking the "Galignani" from her bag, she took her eldest daughter so far into her confidence as to point out the advertisements, and to say—"How in the world are we to find out all these streets, Agatha?" "If I were you, mamma, I would take a hackney-coach," replied the young lady. "Certainly, I will take a hackney-coach," replied her mother, "if—" she added, with a little embarrassment,—"if there are any." "Oh! there are lots, mamma!" exclaimed both her daughters at once. "That was one that brought us from the diligence. Did you not see the number?" said Maria.

Thus reminded, Mrs. Roberts, who at that time did certainly feel a little overpowered by all she had undertaken, recovered her composure, and wisely resigning the paper to Agatha, for the purpose of studying the names of the streets, she ordered a coach to be called, which was done as readily by the well-initiated waiter as if she had asked for a *fiacre*, instead of a "*voiture avec un numéro*." Miss Agatha pronounced the names of the various streets, and the numbers of various houses, very distinctly, and the coachman obeyed the orders given with such celerity, that in the course of about two hours they had seen no less than eight sets of apartments, among which one was selected, as being in all respects likely to suit them. The bargain for *one month certain* was speedily made, and the party drove back to their hotel in high spirits, and with the comfortable persuasion that all their difficulties were over.

"Pay the coachman, my dear," said Mrs. Roberts, addressing her husband.

"Ask him how much, Agatha," said that obedient functionary, addressing, in his turn, his accomplished eldest daughter; and "Qu'est qu'il y a à payer?" demanded the young lady of the coachee. The man put himself in the attitude of one who has a calculation to make, tucking his whip under his left arm, and extending the fingers of his left hand, while, with the fore-finger of the right, he began to mutter the name of a street over each extended finger. But these, though he included the thumb, were not sufficient for his purpose, and he therefore shifted his whip, and recommenced the same process, only reversing the order of his hands; and having thus reached the fourth finger of his right hand, he made a French bow, and said, with a French smile, "Treize francs et demi, mademoiselle, et puis, le petit pour boire."

Agatha translated the man's words very faithfully for the benefit of her papa, adding, however, that she thought it extravagantly dear.

"Dear!" repeated her comely parent, his florid complexion deepening to crimson—"dear! it is the most audacious imposition that ever was attempted. Mrs. Roberts, my dear, step back for a

minute," he added, raising his voice so as to overtake his retreating lady. "For goodness' sake just tell me what I am to do? This fellow here asks thirteen francs and a half, and something over for drink, though we have not been gone from this door above two hours by my watch at the very utmost."

"Asks, Mr. Roberts! How can you be so silly? What does it signify what he asks? Of course we know that the French are the greatest rogues upon earth. You will just pay him the proper fare, if you please, and not a farthing more."

"But how am I to know, my dear, what his fare is?" demanded her husband.

"Good gracious! Can't you ask the people of the house?"

By the help of Agatha this was done; and the waiter she applied to, after exchanging a few words with the coachman, assured her that he was asking no more than his due. The anger and indignation of Mrs. Roberts were far too great to permit her making any inquiries respecting the nature of the charge, beyond the fact of its amount, and as she had twice in her life resisted with success an exorbitant charge from a London hackney-coachman, she instantly determined to try her skill in the same manner in Paris. Neither the coachman nor the waiter, whose judgment in the cause she had so vehemently rejected, appeared at all averse to her having recourse to legal authority to settle the matter, but, on the contrary, as soon as they became aware that such was her wish, they afforded all the information necessary for immediately making the application she desired. The process by which the question was decided was a very summary one, consisting of a question on her part, or rather on that of her daughter, and an answer on that of the magistrate to whom she had applied. Nothing could be more explicit than this answer, which assured her that the charge made was perfectly correct, as, according to her own admission, conveyed by the lips of her fair daughter, she had been driven to eight different houses, where she had stopped, and finally to the hotel from whence she had set out. Nothing could exceed the explicitness of this sentence, unless it were the politeness with which it was pronounced. The magistrate obligingly took the trouble of making the calculation of nine times thirty sous for her satisfaction, and then told her that the *petit pour boire* was a matter of custom, but not of right, and that she might, if she chose, refuse to give it. He then very good-naturedly proceeded to point out to the ladies the blunder they had made in not taking the coach "*à l'heure*," as, without this precaution, every stoppage might be legally reckoned a separate fare. All this, though with studious civility addressed to both ladies, was understood only by the younger one, Mrs. Roberts listening with ears which helped her but little, but with eyes that flashed unmitigated indignation on the speaker; and when he ceased, or rather before, she burst forth

with the expression of feelings she could no longer control, exclaiming, "Vous êtes, une et tout, de voleurs, et rascals, monsieur, et soyez sure que je disais tout cela a tout la monde."

Miss Agatha was a good deal shocked at this attack upon a gentleman who had comported himself with so much politeness, and she ventured to pronounce a gentle remonstrance in her mother's ear, concluding with an earnest request that, as the business was ended, she would withdraw.

"Don't be impertinent, Agatha," replied the indignant Mrs. Roberts, shaking her off. "I know quite as well as you do what this audacious fellow means by his bows and his smiles, and he shall know that I do, too, before I stir a step."

Then, turning fiercely towards the magistrate, she said in a voice that brought every eye upon her, and there were many in the office,

"Monsieur, nous suis pas si ignorant pour non savoir le raison pour votre manière à ma fille. Vous voulez faire de l'amour à elle, monsieur. Je sais comment comprendre tout cela parfaitement. Mais si vous venez près de notre maison pour aucun excuse dans la monde, je prendre soin de dire tout ce histoire à l'Ambassadeur de l'Angleterre." Having pronounced these words, in a voice very peculiarly loud and distinct, she took her daughter's arm under her own, and stalked out of the room.

CHAPTER III.

I MUST not attempt to follow my dear countrywoman and her family step by step; although, if I did so, I should find that there was scarcely a single transaction in which they were engaged, during the first few weeks of their residence in Paris, which would not recall some trait by which the generally received theory respecting English manners on the continent might be accounted for. But we must content ourselves by a specimen, taken here and there at intervals, which may suffice to enable an acute reader to guess at the rest.

The apartment hired by Mrs. Roberts was really very handsome, and though not quite so cheap as she had anticipated, she speedily discovered not only that it was cheaper than a London house, but that three servants in Paris did quite as well as four in London, nay, as well as four and a-half, or, in other words, as four and a page, which was the extent of their London establishment. The use of a carriage, too, if skilfully managed, appeared now to be within reach of their income, which it had never been before, even when that income was considerably larger than at present; so that, on the whole, the Roberts family were exceedingly well contented with the change they had made.

"It is easy enough," said Mrs. Roberts to her admiring husband,

"it is easy enough, my dear, to see why and how it is that people contrive to get so much more into company abroad than at home. The moment, you know, that one made a good new acquaintance in London, one had to send them an invitation to dinner; and here, you have but to open your eyes a little in order to perceive that no such expense is necessary. This makes an immense difference, Mr. Roberts."

"Immense, indeed, my dear!" replied Mr. Roberts, very cordially. "Think of the bills that came in from fishmongers, and poulterers, and greengrocers, and confectioners—not to speak of the wine bill!—getting worse and worse, too, every year! That was the real ruination, my dear, after all."

"Yes, to be sure; but it was all ruin, that is the real truth; and I saw plainly enough, before I ever thought of coming abroad, that as nothing but dinner parties ever will bring decent men to one's house—at least in England, I mean—it was out of the question that our poor dear girls, with all their beauty and accomplishments, would ever have a fair chance there."

"Quite true, my dear, quite true. I certainly do enjoy the seeing you make one gay acquaintance after another, without ever hearing the old tune, you know, Sarah—'Mr. Roberts, we must have a dinner party.' It certainly is a good relief, I won't deny it."

"And I am not going to deny it either, I promise you," returned the lady; "and, moreover, I think we are getting on admirably. Lady Morton and Lady Foreton both told me last night at the embassy, that they hoped to have the pleasure of making our acquaintance."

"Pray, mamma, did Lady Morton and Lady Foreton really say they hoped to make our acquaintance?" demanded Maria, as soon as her father was out of the way. "Because, if they did, I think it is exceedingly wrong to let to-day pass over without leaving cards."

"They certainly did say it, Maria, and I know why too. I have found out that they are both widows, that they are cousins, and that they live together. Moreover, I know into the bargain that Lady Foreton, who they say has been beautiful, has been a good deal talked of, and that Lady Morton did not live with her husband during the last year or two of his life; and now they have taken very beautiful apartments together in the Rue de Rivoli, and are going to give balls. No wonder, therefore, that girls, dressed as you were last night, if they were as ugly as sin, would be a great catch to anybody going to give balls—not to mention the particularly striking appearance of your brother. Of course, I understand the thing perfectly."

"And you will leave cards to-day, mamma, won't you?" inquired the two young ladies in a breath.

"Why, yes, I suppose we had better not delay it, if we mean to

get to the first ball. But here comes Edward; he is ten times more a man of the world than your father, young as he is. I want your opinion, Edward, about visiting Lady Morton and Lady Foreton. I suppose you have heard all the gossip about them? What do you think? Is there any objection?"

"Objection? Good heavens? no, ma'am. What objection can there possibly be to visiting two ladies of rank, who have taken a magnificent apartment in the most fashionable *quartier* of Paris, and who have given out that they intend to receive?"

The son and heir of the Roberts family had always been a person of consequence in the domestic circle; but his importance was now increasing daily, and might very literally be said to grow with his growth, and strengthen with his strength. The budding hair beginning to be visible upon his upper lip, and which it had been one of his best delights to shave during the last year of his university studies, had been suffered to grow since the second day of his residence in Paris; and being of a dark colour, was rapidly assuming the impressive aspect of a moustache. His mother, and perhaps his sisters too, watched the growth of this manly appendage with satisfaction almost equal to his own; and, in fact, it really was very important to them all. The youth, as I have said, was well-looking; his sisters had, before they left London, inured his brain to the exercise of waltzing, by pretty incessant morning practice during the last vacation, in the Baker-street drawing-room; and the skill thus acquired had now been well-nigh brought to perfection, by assiduous daily practice in the private rooms of the most accomplished professor in Europe. His style of dress, too, was really as good as the inexperienced imitation of so young a scholar could reasonably be expected to make it; and, take him for all in all, he was precisely the sort of youth with whom young ladies under twenty long to dance, and with whom young ladies verging towards thirty are thankful to dance, if they can get nothing better. The sisters of a young man of this class are soon taught to know the value of such a brother. They have no need to fear, in going into a ball-room where there are strangers, that they shall be greeted with cold examining glances, or find any difficulty in obtaining an eligible *vis-à-vis* among the young beauties they find there. They have only to persuade him to let them "arm him with the freedom of a" sister during a few turns up and down the room, and their invitation to the set is secured, beyond the danger of a single dissenting voice. Agatha and Maria Roberts were by no means dull girls; they saw and felt all this by a sort of natural instinct, even before experience had taught them the full value of its effect; and it is no wonder, therefore, that his judgment respecting the propriety of immediately calling upon Lady Morton and Lady Foreton was received by them as conclusive.

"Now then, mamma, I suppose you will have no further scruples?" said Maria.

Mrs. Roberts nodded her assent, saying with a smile, as she looked at the pretty figure of her son, while he supported his elbow on the low chimney-piece—"young men are sure to be the best judges on such questions as these. We will leave the cards when we go out after luncheon for our walk in the Tuileries."

CHAPTER IV.

AMONG many new acquaintance made and making at Paris, Mrs. Roberts had found one old one. This was a certain Mrs. Bretlow, who might, indeed, be called an old acquaintance, inasmuch as the intimacy now renewed between the ladies had existed before either of them had been married. As to all the various twistings and turnings in Mrs. Bretlow's destiny, which had ended in her becoming a childless widow, resident in Paris, they matter not. When Mrs. Roberts discovered her old friend, by happening to sit next her at the English church, and catching sight of her name in her prayer-book, she found her in apparently easy circumstances living in a neat apartment *au troisième* in the Faubourg du Roule, and enjoying the *entrée* to many French houses of considerable fashion, if not of the highest "*quartier St. Germain*" rank. Both the ladies were delighted by the unexpected meeting, which afforded Mrs. Bretlow the satisfaction of hearing a great deal about old acquaintance whom she had lost sight of for many years, and which eventually gave to Mrs. Roberts and her family an opportunity of seeing much more of French society than they could ever have done without it. Consequently the Roberts family (with the exception of Mr. Roberts himself) were in ecstasies when an introduction, managed very skilfully by Mrs. Bretlow, obtained an invitation to an evening party at one of the gayest houses of the *Chaussée d'Antin* aristocracy.

Madame de Soissonac was an exceedingly pretty and elegant-looking young woman, whose husband, a rich manufacturer of Lyons, appeared never so well pleased as when the magnificent set of rooms, which he had furnished on his marriage, were crowded with guests. But, notwithstanding this expensive hospitality, he did little or nothing himself towards bringing together the gay crowds which he delighted to see parading through the rooms his lavish expenditure had decorated. All that part of the business was left to his wife, and was admirably managed by her. Of course it was *morally* impossible that any pretty young woman, occupying so enviable a situation, could escape the tax always levied upon those who are conspicuous in any way; that is to say, that Madame de Soissonac was a good deal talked of. This phrase, if used in England, respecting a young and pretty married woman, means, I

believe, invariably, that she has been incorrect in her conduct as a wife ;—but in France it means no such thing. No, nobody talked about Madame de Soissonac's lovers, but a great many people talked about her extravagance, her horses, her carriages, her dresses, and, above all, of the absurd and every way detestable vanity of which she and her husband had been guilty in prefixing *de* before their name. But not for this were the *salons* of Madame de Soissonac the less brilliantly filled ; and well might our English friends rejoice at the thrice happy chance which had opened these *salons* to them. Pretty-looking, always well-dressed, and with very little, or at any rate very short-lived, insular shyness to obscure their good gifts, the Miss Robertses, as well as their portly mamma, soon became-constant guests at this gay mansion ; nor was their daily-improving brother less fortunate ; and so effectually did the charming hostess exert herself to bring the young strangers advantageously forward, that her partners at their weekly balls were always amongst the most distinguished persons present. Great was the triumph of Mrs. Roberts. Who but herself, as she regularly asked her family, collectively and individually, every morning—who but herself could have contrived to make so much of reading a name (which she had never heard mentioned for the last twenty years) in a prayer-book ?

But why—oh, why is it the fate of humanity that no blessing ever visits it without being followed by a concomitant evil ? Before the introduction of the Roberts family to Madame de Soissonac, they had been delighted, flattered, gratified in the highest degree, by having been invited to the English embassy two Friday evenings out of the six that they had been in Paris. But *now* they began not only to think, but to say aloud to all who would listen to them, that “the manner in which the English were neglected at the embassy, was perfectly disgraceful !”

“May it not be,” said a French lady, who was upon one occasion the recipient of this complaint,—“may it not be that the number of English in Paris is so great as to render it impossible for Lady G—— to receive them all every time her rooms are open ?”

“All ?” replied Miss Agatha, with great indignation. “All the English ? Nobody of course expects that Lady G—— should invite *all* the English. But people like ourselves, who move in the very first circles of Paris society, may certainly expect to be among those who *are* invited.”

“Always ?” said the French lady, with a gentle smile.

“Yes, madame, certainly, always ; why not ? Why, *s'il vous plait*, should our names ever be omitted when the weekly list is made out ? It is impossible but that we should consider it as little short of positive impertinence. We none of us, I assure you, scruple to say so—not to mention the extraordinary want of hospi-

talities shown by their never having once asked us to dinner. I really should like to ask them what they think they are sent here for? Coming, too, with such introductions as we did, it is perfectly unpardonable!"

Perhaps it is not very extraordinary that the lady to whom this was said, was heard to observe afterwards, that she certainly did not covet the situation of ambassador from St. James's to the Tuileries, although there were many reasons which might make it rank as the most desirable diplomatic appointment in the world.

"Mais il faut avouer," she added, "que les Anglais sont bien drôle."

Nor were these heartburnings respecting the ingratitude of the ambassador and ambassadress of England towards their distinguished countrymen the only evils that followed upon the pleasures enjoyed in the splendid *salons* of Madame de Soissonac. It must not be supposed that Mr. Edward Roberts was a degenerate son of his high-spirited mother; on the contrary, he inherited a good deal both of her noble self-confidence and high-minded ambition. The gay weeks that had passed since the arrival of his family in Paris, had not been an idle interval for him. Never had he omitted an opportunity of pushing into intimacy every casual introduction which seemed in any way to promise a profitable result; and Mrs. Roberts had very soon the extreme gratification of knowing that her son might every day be seen walking arm-in-arm on the Boulevard Italien with sundry dissipated young countrymen, who, whatever might have been their "*standing*" in St. James's-street, considered themselves as specimens of the highest class of English. From these new friends and associates, Mr. Edward Roberts learned much; and there was nothing to which he listened with so much interest as to the accounts they gave of their success in all affairs of gallantry. Their histories were all of the *veni, vidi, vici* kind; and certainly, if their statements were correct, the fathers, husbands, and brothers of France would do well to close their doors for ever against the too fascinating attractions of our English youth.

"Upon my soul you seem to have had capital fun here," returned the juvenile Roberts to the series of interesting anecdotes to which he had been listening; "and the best part of the joke is, that, the ladies being all married, there is no danger of being desired to 'declare your intentions,' which must, I think, without any exception, be the horriddest bore in the world."

"Bore?" reiterated the youngest of seven sons, who had the honour of having a baronet for their father. "I believe it is a bore, and so you might say if you were in the army, and stuck down in Irish country quarters as my brother Tom was last year. But in this blessed city you may make love just as much as you like, without any sort

of mischief following. Of course you know it must be to married women. Nobody here, indeed, ever dares take any notice of girls (unless they are English)."

"Well! anything is better than being called to account by a musty-fusty old father, merely because one has paid a girl the compliment of admiring her," replied the hourly-improving Edward Roberts. "But I suspect," he added, "that it must be necessary to know a little what you are about before you make downright positive love to a married woman. She would be likely to kick up a row, wouldn't she, if she did not happen to like you?"

"Kick up a row, my dear fellow?" returned one of his accomplished companions. "Much you seem to know about the matter. I give you my sacred honour, Roberts, that I have never known a married Frenchwoman yet, under five-and-thirty, who did not as decidedly expect me to make love to her, as one of our English girls expects to be asked to dance at a ball when a man has desired to be introduced to her. Nay, moreover, I tell you that if you do *not* make love to them you will speedily be sent to Coventry, as a stupid English *bête* not worth the civility of a bow."

A few such conversations as the above, went far towards removing some of the old-fashioned English prejudices which young Mr. Roberts had brought out with him; and he speedily determined not to waste his time any longer, as he had done; but to select, without further delay, such an object for his vows as might render his residence in Paris as enchanting to him as he was assured it had been to his more experienced friends. He would have found no difficulty whatever in making this choice (for he really thought Madame de Soissonac one of the most captivating women he had ever seen) had it not been for some trifling doubts, which still hung about him, as to the certainty of his success. It was not that he questioned the truth of his friends' statements in general, and still less did he doubt his own chance of success in particular; but he thought he should like, before he committed himself by an open declaration of his passion, to learn, if possible, something more concerning the object of it, than he had as yet found any opportunity of acquiring. With this view he made a morning visit to his mother's old acquaintance, Mrs. Bretlow, at the hour when she was known to be at home to her friends, hoping that by making Madame de Soissonac the subject of conversation to the sort of circle he was likely to find there, he might hear something which might throw such a degree of light upon her character as might enable him to decide for or against her claims to become the idol of his affections.

Mr. Edward found at Mrs. Bretlow's much such a party as he expected, and no greater difficulty than he anticipated in making Madame de Soissonac the subject of conversation. Every one seemed to agree that her *salon* was one of the most agreeable in

Paris, and she herself very charming, although one thought she was *un petit peu* too thin; and another that she was *un petit peu* too pale, &c., &c.; but every one acknowledged that she was perfectly elegant, and that her toilet was irreproachable. Now all this Mr. Edward Roberts knew perfectly well before, and he therefore determined to take courage, and at once to hazard a question, the answer to which would go far towards deciding his future conduct. Our young man, it must be observed, had already made no inconsiderable progress in the French language, and, with a little occasional assistance from his friend Mrs. Bretlow, he contrived to take his share in the conversation, and, at length screwing his courage to the important point he had in view, he managed to ask very intelligibly, whether the fair lady they were speaking of had not been a good deal talked of in Paris?

"Mais, mon Dieu, oui!" exclaimed two or three voices at once; and one lady, in a tone of considerable authority, added, "That unless it were perhaps in the very highest circles, she had never known any one more talked of than Madame de Soissonac."

"Assurément!—mais assurément!" was replied by two or three of the circle, and so distinctly, that Edward Roberts felt quite sure of his having comprehended perfectly what they said.

Had a young Frenchman made up his mind as decidedly as our young Englishman now did, to make a declaration of love to Madame de Soissonac, it is rather more than probable that he would have sought the earliest opportunity of finding that charming person alone. But had any such course of proceeding been proposed to our young tyro, he would certainly have replied that he knew better than that. In truth, though by no means particularly diffident, the young Englishman thought it would be necessary to pave the way to this decisive interview by a series of those delicate initiatory attentions with which young gentlemen on this side the channel are apt to make evident to all what those on the other prefer communicating to one alone. No sooner, therefore, had he made up his mind on the subject, and decided positively that Madame de Soissonac, and no other, should for the time being be elevated to the enviable station of his *chère amie*, than he dressed himself "by the card," and, brushing his hair and tying his cravat with a tender anxiety that proved he was very much in earnest, he set forth "alone in his glory," to call upon her. Her carriage was at the door, but nevertheless he was admitted, and found the fair object of his intended vows in the act of reading aloud to half-a-dozen visitors a *jeu d'esprit* that had just been added to the collection in her album. She gently bent her head in salutation as the young man entered, but made no pause in her lecture. Had he been French instead of English, he could not have understood very much of an epigram of which he only heard half: he did not, however, allow himself to be disconcerted

by this, but showed his handsome white teeth as cordially as the rest of the party, when the lady ceased. But this was not all he did. The party he had found there, consisting of two ladies and four gentlemen, were all, as well as their fair hostess, standing; for, in fact, they were just about to separate, the carriage of madame having been announced. But not for this did the young lover deem it necessary to change his purpose of not suffering another day to elapse without making Madame de Soissonac aware of her conquest; for, in fact, he was beginning to feel a good deal ashamed of not having paid her this compliment before. He therefore, while the rest of the party were making their lively remarks on the lines they had heard, glided round to the other side of the table around which the party were standing, and seating himself on the sofa from whence Madame de Soissonac had just risen, he extended his hand to take the manuscript volume she held in hers, and looking up in her face with a smile at once tender and familiar, said, "*Laissez-moi voir donc.*" Madame de Soissonac coloured slightly, and, withdrawing the book, replied, "Pardon, monsieur," locking at the same time its little golden padlock with a jewelled key which decorated the watch-chain suspended from her fair neck.

"Madame va sortir," said one of the gentlemen present, taking up his hat and preparing to depart.

"Si, si; il faut dire adieu," said more than one voice, and a general movement announced their intention of taking leave. But young Mr. Roberts kept his ground, or rather his sofa, depositing his hat under the table in a manner which spoke very distinctly his intention of prolonging his visit. Now nothing in the world can be *si mauvaise ton* at Paris as any sort of *persiflage*, or, in plain English, quizzing, upon any occasion where accident may betray a greater degree of intimate acquaintance between a lady and gentleman than the parties publicly acknowledge; and the two ladies and the four gentlemen looked as grave as owls, while they retreated from Madame de Soissonac's drawing-room as rapidly as politeness would permit. Inexpressibly provoked, Madame de Soissonac continued standing, awaiting in perfect silence the young gentleman's explanation of this extraordinary manœuvre, and probably expecting that the awkward creature was charged with some stupid message from his mother. But it appeared that the young man did not yet feel himself prepared for the declaration he meditated, and thought it would be better to preface it by a little more preliminary flirtation. He therefore began turning over the books and ornaments which lay scattered on the table, muttering as he did so something about his satisfaction that "*tous ces gens là*" had taken themselves off.

"Monsieur?" said Madame de Soissonac, in reply, and with a look and accent which, if he had understood French thoroughly,

might have sufficed to bring him to his senses. But, instead of interpreting either the looks or accents of the lady, the young man was occupied in recalling all that his Mentor of the Boulevards had said, respecting the propriety, or rather the necessity, of declaring his passionate admiration of every married lady with whom he fortunately found himself *tête-à-tête*. The instructions he had received were too distinct to be mistaken, and, therefore, making a magnanimous effort to conquer the embarrassment which beset him, he exclaimed, clasping his hands very passionately, "Ah, madame ! Placez-vous, je vous prie, sur le canapé pres de moi !"

Madame de Soissonac stared at him for a moment, and then very gently walked towards the chimney and rang the bell.

"Que tu* es belle !" exclaimed the young gentleman, taking courage.

"Que tu es Anglais !" returned the lady, walking out of the room, and making her escape into her carriage.

CHAPTER V.

UNFORTUNATELY for the Roberts family, the brilliant weekly ball of Madame de Soissonac recurred on the evening following the important day on which the "undaunted Edward" had thought proper to peril his hopes by uttering the energetic and very decisive exclamation of "*Que tu es belle !*" as related in the last chapter. Madame de Soissonac, though the rents which supplied the funds for her splendid hospitalities were furnished, not by the plough, but the loom, was much too well-bred a person to make a fuss and a scene about anything. She would as soon have thought of stirring up the dust and sand which lay unseen in sediment at the bottom of the marble reservoir, whence sprang the sparkling fountain which refreshed the blossom-scented air of her fourth drawing-room, as have clouded her fair brow with a frown when she saw the accustomed group of Robertses make their appearance. That the offending youth himself was to "live a man forbid," was, of course, a matter decided upon ; but Madame de Soissonac understood the business before her a great deal too well to set about it by drawing all eyes upon her, by marked rudeness to his family. True it is, indeed, that before the end of the evening, the sensitive Maria remarked that Madame de Soissonac, whom she chose to consider as *her own* very particular friend, had not once given her the wished-for opportunity of practising that recently-acquired caressing little manœuvre by which ladies gracefully proclaim, across the largest theatre, or the most crowded ball-room, their tender affection for each other. On former occasions, it is

* This sudden and astounding use of the most eloquent of pronouns is a trait from nature.

certain that this very distinguished specimen of the Boursier aristocracy had once, twice, thrice, in the course of a single evening, been seen to flutter the taper tips of her close-fitting, snow-white, inimitable *gants de Paris*, within half an inch of her pretty mouth, with her smiling eyes fixed the while on the delighted Maria Roberts, in token of feeling the most affectionate inclination to embrace her, did time and place permit. This part of "friendship's holy rite" was now wanting, which was a great deal the more provoking, because the responding caress to which it gave birth was never performed by Maria without peculiar satisfaction,—first, because she felt certain that she did it with very peculiar grace; and, secondly, because at that time she knew of nothing else she could do which would be likely to give her an air decidedly French. As to the young man himself, who had been just sufficiently puzzled by the fair lady's manner of receiving the first impassioned words he had ventured to utter, to feel that he had rather enter her saloon accompanied by his mother, father, and sisters, than alone,—as for the still aspiring, but a little frightened Edward, he was only more elaborately elegant in his dress than on any former occasion, and he had not been five minutes in the room, before he completely recovered his equanimity, and failed not speedily to address Madame de Soissonac in an accent which none of the acute bystanders could mistake either for indifference or timidity, with "Nous allons danser ensemble! N'est pas?"

Had Madame de Soissonac answered at all to this amiable invitation, it is probable that her manner would have so far responded to his as to have been at least equally free from indifference and timidity; but she knew better. Of course she did not hear him, either on that occasion or any other throughout the whole evening, on which he thought proper to address her. But as this deafness produced no change in the charming expression of her pretty face, the youth attributed his disappointment wholly to the density of the brilliant crowd which filled the rooms; and so far all was well.

But nevertheless, and notwithstanding all this fair-seeming continuation of the most important acquaintance they had made, it was unfortunate for the Robertses that this *soirée dansante* followed so closely upon the *matinée galante* of the day before; for, had the fair Parisian been left to meditate upon the subject for another day, it is highly probable that the comedy of the adventure would have become more obvious in her eyes, and its insignificant offence less so. But the anger which the poor youth had inspired was too recent, as yet, to be wholly lost sight of in a laugh, and therefore before the Roberts family, who always stayed in every ball-room to the last, took their departure, she told them, with the very sweetest smile in the world, that unexpected circumstances obliged her to make an alteration in her manner of receiving, and

therefore that she was constrained, with infinite regret, to inform them that it was not in her power to solicit the honour and happiness of their company for the following Tuesday. As the lady gracefully bowed herself back into an inner room as she uttered the last words of this most disagreeable announcement, the startled family had no opportunity of expressing any feeling whatever upon the occasion ; and they put on their cloaks and shawls in perfect silence, which remained unbroken for at least a minute after they had driven from the door. Then it was Mrs. Roberts who spoke first, a precedence which she might not perhaps have enjoyed had not the hearts of her daughters been at the moment too full for utterance.

"What on earth does she mean, Agatha, by *circonstances imprévues*?" said she, drawing up the glass of the carriage with a jerk which plainly proved she suspected something. "Do you suppose she said the same to everybody? If she did not, you know it is quite plain that there must be a screw loose somewhere."

"Of course she did, mamma," replied Maria, before her elder sister could find breath to speak. "How can you possibly suppose that she meant to exclude us personally? I, for one, should be the most ungrateful creature in existence, if I did not know and feel, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that she has conceived an affection for me quite out of the common way. It is vastly likely, to be sure, that she should mean to insult us personally, isn't it?"

"I do not know what to think of it, mamma," replied Agatha, solemnly, as soon as her more volatile sister had ceased speaking; "but anything and everything is more probable than that such a very elegant person as Madame de Soissonac should behave to us with such abominable rudeness for nothing; I will not believe it."

"And I will not allow that she has behaved rudely at all," said Maria; "and I must say that I think it is very ungrateful, as well as very absurd, to accuse her of it till you see whether she drops us entirely, or only means to alter the day or the hour, or the style of her parties. I have no doubt whatever but that we shall have a fresh billet of invitation of some kind or other, before we are twenty-four hours older. Most likely before we get to breakfast to-morrow morning."

"God grant we may, Maria," replied her mother very fervently. "I am sure Paris would not be Paris for you girls, nor for me either indeed, if Madame de Soissonac gave us up. What is your opinion about it, my dear Edward? You don't say a word, and yet I am sure you are more likely to make a good guess than any of us."

It was not because Mr. Edward Roberts had not given himself the trouble of guessing that he had fallen into the silence of which his mother complained; quite the contrary. No man, or boy either, ever set about guessing with more eagerness and energy

than he did on the présent occasion ; but his guesses were not of a nature to be freely communicated, and, moreover, they were exceedingly contradictory. He had listened to every word uttered by the lady of his love in her farewell speech, with ears perfectly incapable of losing a syllable ; and had he understood, as perfectly as he had heard her, he at least would have been spared any further sufferings from the pangs of uncertainty. But he could not make her out at all. At one moment he thought that this prompt dismissal of his father, mother, and sisters from her société, was a measure of precaution, admirably calculated to prevent any inconvenience likely to arise from sharp-sighted domestic observations on what was going on between them.

But then he remembered that this could hardly be the case under a form of society which rendered a *liaison* such as that which he intended to form with Madame de Soissonac, a matter both of invariable custom and fashionable necessity. No, no, it was quite impossible that she should wish all the world to know that he was at her feet. Edward Roberts assured himself, while a roguish smile distended his young moustache, that he knew French manners, and the leading principles of French society, a great deal too well to dwell seriously, even for a moment, on so very absurd an idea ; and then it occurred to him that, in order to enjoy more of his society in private, she might have determined for the present to break through all the engagements which obliged her to pass her evenings in a crowd ; and this thought brought with it a delightful as well as an obvious interpretation of the lady's manner to him during the evening.

"Charming Pauline !" he murmured inwardly, for he had found out that her name was Pauline ; "charming Pauline ! How I adore the feeling which leads her to prefer not speaking to me at all, to the insipid intercourse of a crowded ball-room !"

But well-founded and perfectly rational as the young man, after several minutes' meditation, felt this last-mentioned conjecture to be, he did not think it right to mention it to his family, and therefore, when his mother repeated her petition, that he would give them his opinion on what had passed, he only replied,

"Upon my word, ma'am, I know nothing about it. Perhaps she is tired of having so many large parties, but I do assure you she has never said a word to me on the subject. So I wish you would not ask me."

Never, in short, did a whole family lay their heads upon their pillows in a state of more harassing uncertainty, than did the Robertses that night. Mr. Edward was, however, by many degrees the best off, because he felt within himself the most delightful conviction that he was in some way or other the cause of the lovely Pauline's caprice ; and for a Mr. Edward Roberts, at the age of twenty, there is something very pleasant in this. Nevertheless,

his pillow, like those of the rest of his race, was the witness of a good deal of restlessness—arising in his case chiefly from not exactly knowing what he should be expected to do and say when next he enjoyed the happiness of finding himself *tête-à-tête* with his Pauline.

CHAPTER VI.

THE following day, too, did not pass away without its vexations, among which the not receiving any renewed invitation from Madame de Soissonac was, unfortunately, by no means the most prominent. Mrs. Roberts had really not brought her family to the continent without thinking a good deal about it. She was, as we have already seen, an ambitious woman, and had, long before she finally decided upon this important measure, become aware that neither their position nor their fortune would admit of their obtaining, in London, the place in society for which her soaring spirit yearned. Her daughters were really pretty-looking girls; and as her feelings towards them, as well as towards her peerless Edward, were, to do her justice, very heartily maternal, it is not to be wondered at that their advancement was one of the most prominent features in her schemes for rising into a higher circle of acquaintance. She had heard people, in no way superior to herself as to station, talk familiarly of “lords and dukes, and noble princes,” as among their daily associates during their continental excursions; she had heard, too, from the same persons, that sixpence would go as far as a shilling. On these two statements had all her hopes and all her projects been founded. But these two statements, even presuming them to be strictly true, were scarcely sufficient in the way of information to lead her and her family safely over the continent of Europe. Yet in her case, as in a thousand others, they really formed all the information she possessed. She had heard, indeed, in addition, that multitudes of ruined families went abroad every year, and found that, ruined as they were, they could *do* perfectly well upon the continent, and this, of course, gave her a very delightful feeling of confidence in the certain sufficiency of her own resources. But she had *not* heard it exactly stated how many out of this multitude had sunk, and slunk, and dwindled away, becoming absorbed, as it were, into more or less width of space, and more or less length of time, till every familiar eye had ceased to follow them, while they were finally suffered to evaporate and vanish away, like so many pins, which everybody knows must be somewhere, but concerning whose disappearance from the light of day nobody thinks it worth while to inquire. Respecting this class—a much more numerous one than most of us are aware—Mrs. Roberts knew little, and cared less. With such she had nothing in common, and would have

deemed it sad waste of time to have inquired after, or listened to, any of their adventures. Yet there are enough of such to fill many a stirring volume, but they could not well be divided off into romances, for all the third volumes would be wanting. They would rarely have any very striking catastrophe, ending for the most part in a cold, hopeless, helpless, cheerless blank. But with such, as we have said, Mrs. Roberts felt that she had nothing in common, and therefore, on arriving in Paris, her projects and plans took a direction as opposite as was well possible to what they might have done, had she conceived herself within the possible reach of any pecuniary difficulties. No sooner, therefore, did she find an occasional *entrée* at the embassy secured to her, than she inquired of her friend Mrs. Bretlow the name and address of the most renowned dress-maker in Paris. The inquiry was soon answered, and the answer was soon profited by. The carriage which, after a good deal of discussion as to what was best and most economical, had been hired by the month, speedily conveyed Mrs. Roberts and her two daughters to the fascinating apartments of Mademoiselle Amabel, and there the following conversation took place, Mrs. Roberts, for her part, persevering in her efforts to address the dressmaker in French, and the dressmaker persisting with equal pertinacity in her efforts to reply in English—a mode of conversation by no means uncommon in Paris.

The first salutations over, Mrs. Roberts thus began:—"J'ai besoin, mademoiselle, de toute votre soin pour faire des habits parfaites pour mes enfants."

For half an instant the Frenchwoman was at a loss—making coats for children was not her occupation, and the first idea that occurred to her was, that the portly lady had made a mistake in coming up her staircase instead of that of a tailor who lived near her. But happily she heard Maria exclaim, with all the genuine feeling which such subjects inspire, when selection is the business going on, "Look at this, mamma! This is exactly what we want!"

"Que je suis bête!" murmured the elegant Mademoiselle Amabel. "I rejoice mine self when English laddies come to me," she said aloud, in her very sweetest tone, "for den I find mine self in the hapness of speaking de English. Langue délicateuse! Yeas, mess, you have de aye juste. Dat robe is de mos parfaite in Paris."

"Et l'argent, mademoiselle?" responded Mrs. Roberts. "Combien de prix? Non pas trop, j'espère."

"But exactly nothing! absolument noting, in comparison of its beauté. But ah! madame—it must be bote—bote de sam! Bote des two English beauties to appear à l'ambassade et de sam moment in de sam drass. Oh, haven! de sam etoffe, couleur, forme, garniture—hal de sam! Madame! vous n'avez pas une idée! Il vill be de perfection!"

"I should certainly prefer our being dressed alike," said Agatha. "What do you think, Maria? The effect would certainly be more striking. Don't you think you should like it best? It always gets most looked at."

"Yes, I think so," replied Maria. "We have long agreed that we both of us look best in white—so it is as fair for one as for the other. Do let us have a dress a-piece like this, mamma. Will you?"

"Disez moi la prix, mademoiselle, et je fixerai ma choix," said Mrs. Roberts, in a very impressive tone, which at once conveyed to Mademoiselle Amabel such an idea of her dignity and authority, that she wasted no more time upon the young ladies. To the omnipotent mamma, therefore, the accomplished artist now addressed herself, "Ah, madame, dat is just the most difficile question of all! For, see you, madame, de money of your contree, and de money of my contree are so much puzzle. If I say two hundred francs, you instant tink, maybe, dat I mane twenty or ten pound maybe, and all de vile I mane no such ting, but just so maney littel shabby tenpences. Oh, every ting is so cheap in France. Ven you have been live here one year, or five maybe, you vill find dat out; and den, madame, you vont never trouble yourself to ask about price. Always chuse the pretty, dat is safest."

"Je sais extrêmement bien, mademoiselle," replied Mrs. Roberts, "que tout les choses sont monstrueusement cher en Angleterre, mais cela fait non pas de tout difference, et il faut que je sais la prix—et donc je fixerai."

"Eh, bien, madame, ecoutez. I am known from England to France, and from France to England, for de justness of all my prices. It is mine most greatest pride—eh, bien, madame, you please to put yourself between my hands, and you will be safe—and if dese two beautiful young laddies will only make up their decisions to have everyting from me, and promise to mix nobody's else fashions at all wid mine, I will promise on my side that they shall be the most elegant and admired of all the young laddies at the ambassade. Dat is what I call being fair, open, and honourable; and dat is well know to be my way."

"Well, mademoiselle, I have nothing to say against it. Your things—that is to say, vos choses sont beau, très beau—et je donnerai le permission de faire pour mes deux enfants deux habits comme cet une. Entendez-vous, mademoiselle?"

"Mais oui, madame—et croyez moi vous serez contentes. I do not have the least fear of your approbation. One good ting is, dat I have never any hurry for de payment—I have so many custom!"

Mrs. Roberts seemed to be a good deal struck with the last observation, and having silently paused upon it for a minute, she desired mademoiselle to let her see the very handsomest cloak that the establishment had to boast of at the present moment.

"Is it for madame, her own self?" demanded Mademoiselle Amabel.

"Oui, mademoiselle," she replied. "Il est pour moi."

Whereupon Mademoiselle Amabel vanished for about a moment, and then returned with a benignant smile on her countenance, and bearing gracefully upon her extended arm a splendid combination of velvet, satin, and lace. The eyes of Mrs. Roberts seemed to spring upon it, while their orbits appeared to be distended, as if to give the passionate glance free passage.

"Permettez moi!" said Mademoiselle Amabel, with almost equal intensity of feeling; and, as she spoke, she daintily and skilfully placed the cloak on the broad shoulders of Mrs. Roberts, in the most advantageous manner possible.

"Upon my word, mamma, it makes you look like duchess," said Agatha, gazing on her parent with a charming expression of filial pride.

"N'est pas?" exclaimed mademoiselle in a sort of rapture. Mrs. Roberts, meanwhile, uttered not a word; but turning herself round first to the right and then to the left, before the Psyche glass, her features gradually relaxed into a smile, which said more forcibly than any words could have done, "It is becoming!"

Mademoiselle Amabel had not watched the emotions produced day after day by that magic mirror for nothing. Her experience had taught her to know, with the acuteness of a fowler watching his nets, at what moment her fluttering prey was most completely in her power. While matters were in doubt, she would patiently stand, hushed into profoundest silence, while the temptation did its work; but when such a smile as the comely face of Mrs. Roberts now displayed broke forth, she knew the work was done; and then it was, and not before, that she gave her snare the little jerk that was to conclude the business.

"Does madame wish to have this put aside? It is not encore tout à fait de time to sell it—for it have been seen almost by nobody—and, sans contredit, it is de most perfect ting dat we have produced dis winter. Peut-être madame will suffer us to keep this, and make her anoder very much like as can be?"

This suggestion was a *coup de grace* to the prudence of poor Mrs. Roberts.

"Non!" she replied, resolutely, "je ne veux pas avoir que cela. You understand? I mean to have this very identical cloak. Indeed, as I have got the carriage at the door, I don't see any reason why I should not take it away with me. Fold it up for me, if you please."

Mademoiselle sighed, and assumed rather a piteous look; however, she presently began to fold up the mantle with an air of dignified resignation, and only murmuring as she looked at its rich white satin lining, "Vraiment c'est dommage de la vendre si tôt,"

laid it upon a chair, while she waited for further orders—waited, but not idly—for first a cap was taken from its stand, and then a bonnet, each being displayed to the greatest advantage before the longing eyes of the party, and occasionally put upon the ready heads of each of them.

“Have you asked the price of the cloak, mamma?” said the sensible Agatha, in a whisper.

“No, my dear, I am going to do it presently,” replied Mrs. Roberts, very gently, but wishing in heart that Miss Agatha would mind her own business. She presently added, however, in another whisper, “I have no doubt in the world that it is horribly dear; but the fact is, Agatha, that it is a sort of thing one *must* have. What good can it do my having forced your father into having a carriage if I am to deny myself what is absolutely necessary for making a decent appearance in it?”

“Oh! certainly! You are perfectly right, ma’am,” replied the young lady, in whose active mind a whole train of reasoning, awakened by her mamma’s remark, was rapidly developing itself. “I know perfectly well that there is no use in the world in our straining and striving to get into society, unless you can contrive to let us all dress decently. At this very moment, both Maria and I have bonnets that we ought to be ashamed of. Don’t you think so, mamma!”

The eyes of Mrs. Roberts were fixed upon the cloak while she listened to her daughter, and the breadth and delicacy of the lace, which hung over the side of the chair, gave her, for a moment, rather a disagreeable sort of sensation.

“At any rate,” thought she, “if there should be any fuss or difficulty made about it, it shall not be increased by making the poor girls think that I care more for my own appearance than I do for theirs;” whereupon, turning to her daughter, she replied, “Yes, indeed, my dear Agatha, I do think so, and I have been thinking so ever since I came into the room.” Then lowering her voice still more, she added, “You heard what she said about not wanting the money. There will be considerable convenience in that. You all give me credit, I believe, for being a pretty good manager, and I have too much confidence in myself on that point to feel any doubts about being able to bring everything quite square, if I am not hurried about it; so you have my free leave, girls, to choose a bonnet a-piece—and I desire they may be both elegant and becoming; there is no economy in saving a penny upon a bonnet.”

There certainly never was a more agreeable morning’s shopping performed than Mrs. Roberts and her daughters enjoyed that day. Everything went smoothly and pleasantly, as Maria observed. No preaching, no bother, no difficulty of any sort. For Mrs. Roberts, not being aware that she could ‘so immediately obtain credit, had

taken care to provide herself with a little ready money, which, to do her justice, she certainly had intended to expend in purchasing a pretty ball-dress for each of her daughters. But as the necessity for immediately paying for them had been thus conveniently removed, the twelve pounds in her purse were scattered among a multitude of shops before they returned home, in the purchase of articles, all of which, as they were mutually and severally convinced, they wanted very much indeed, although, when they set out on their expedition, they had made up their minds that they must wait a little longer for them.

On the day following the ball at Madame de Soissonac's, which had ended in the disagreeable manner already related, Mrs. Roberts and her daughters were sitting together in the drawing-room after a late breakfast, deeply engaged in discussing the unintelligible adventure of the preceding night, when their servant informed them that there was a gentleman in the ante-room who desired to speak with madame on business.

"On business? I wonder who it can be? Dites à le monsieur de entrez," said Mrs. Roberts, rousing her energies for the production of a great deal of French.

The servant accordingly threw wide the door, and a very well-dressed personage entered, holding a paper packet, considerably larger than an ordinary-sized letter, in one hand, and his hat in the other.

"I come, madam," said the stranger, "on the part of Mademoiselle Amabel, who has taken the liberty of sending in her little bill; and, as she has been unexpectedly called upon to make a large payment to the manufacturer who supplies her with silks, she will be obliged by immediate payment."

Mrs. Roberts became as red as scarlet; but, without speaking, she held out her hand for the packet, and endeavoured, not without some success, to look dignified and composed. Nevertheless, her hand trembled a little as she removed the envelope, and opened the preternaturally long-looking sheet of paper it contained. It was not on the first side, nor on the second, no, nor on the third either, that the sum total she sought for was to be found—for that first visit to Mademoiselle Amabel, which has been described above, had not been the last. But on the fourth side, in exceedingly legible figures, inscribed upon the broad column ruled for the sum total of francs, were to be seen a line of four figures, the first of which was the figure 2. Those which followed were, of course, of comparatively little importance; but, in plain English, this milliner and dressmaker's bill, for herself and her daughters during the last nine weeks, amounted to eighty-seven pounds, and an odd franc or two over.

It did not take very long to unfold the packet, or to arrive at

the page bearing the record of the amount, but it sufficed to bring both the Miss Robertses to such a station behind the sofa on which their mamma sat, as enabled them very speedily to become as well acquainted with the state of the case as herself. Mademoiselle Agatha ; Mademoiselle Maria ; Mademoiselle Maria ; Mademoiselle Agatha ; pretty frequently repeated in every column, naturally attracted a good deal of their attention; but Maria was a quick and lively girl, and instead of muttering forth any phrases indicative of wonder and dismay at the frequent repetition of her own name, she exclaimed,

"Only see, mamma, how much higher your cloak comes than any other article. I always thought it would be so."

There was a sort of flint in this speech which struck against the steel of Mrs. Roberts' temperament, and elicited a spark which showed that she did not intend to sink under a surprise, which certainly was not agreeable. Mrs. Roberts had calculated that the bill of Mademoiselle Amabel might amount, at the very most, to about five-and-thirty pounds, and, as she supposed it would not be called for for some months, she had calculated that, by persevering economy, she should be perfectly prepared to meet it, without saying a single word to Mr. Roberts on the subject. Clever as she was, however, she had now decidedly made a great blunder; and it was not very easy to see, at the first glance, how she was to get out of the scrape into which she had fallen. But, as I have said, she did not lose her courage, but raising her eyes, and fixing them on the messenger, she said,

"Disez à votre maitress" —

It was now the man's turn to colour, which he did, looking rather fierce at the same time. Mrs. Roberts observed it, and attributed it to displeasure at her having forgotten his rather remarkable proficiency in the English language.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, young man; I quite forgot that you knew how to speak English, which I really think I still prefer to every other language, when I can make it convenient to use it. Tell your mademoiselle then, if you please, that, as the bill is a good deal longer than I expected, it is absolutely necessary that I should look it over quite at my leisure. And you may mention to her also, if you please, that, by her foolishly leading me into such a great error about the time when she wished to be paid, I shall not be ready with the money for a day or two—that's all. You may go now, if you please. I will see about it; and your mademoiselle shall hear from me."

The man civilly replied that he had no doubt the end of the week would suit Mademoiselle Amabel perfectly well, and then, with as low a bow as he thought necessary, left the room.

"What will papa say?" exclaimed Agatha, as the door closed behind him. "Isn't eighty pounds, mamma, a monstrous deal of money

for such a short time? Don't you think it is a shocking large sum?"

"No, my dear; I do not think it is at all, considering the very elegant appearance that I have taken care you should both of you make. As to my part of it, everybody knows that no girl in the world, let her be ever so handsome, or ever so elegant, can hope to get on, either in marrying, or even getting a decent partner, unless her chaperon is well-dressed, and looks like a woman of fashion. On this point I am quite sure your father will agree with me. But I own I *am* rather afraid that he will find fault at seeing such an immense quantity of things put down to your names. I am sure if he is angry, I don't know what on earth you will say to him."

"Don't you think it might be possible, mamma, to pay this horrid bill without his knowing anything about it?" said Agatha, looking very sad. "It would be so much better, you know, if you could; for when he once gets hold of a thing, he bores one for ever with it—doesn't he?"

"He is a little in that line, Agatha, there is no denying it," replied her mother. "But you know I never get anything worse for my share than just the tiresomeness of listening to it. You both of you know perfectly well, that he would never dream of finding fault with me for buying a cloak or anything else. Indeed it would be very odd if he did."

"But you wouldn't like, mamma, to hear him going ding-dong on, day after day, every time that we put on anything decent, eternally repeating, 'eighty pounds in nine weeks! eighty pounds in nine weeks! eighty pounds in nine weeks!'" said Maria, wittily putting her hands behind her back, and walking up and down the room with a step and attitude, which certainly resembled those of her papa more than might have been expected from so light-footed and slender a young lady. Mrs. Roberts smiled, and Agatha laughed aloud.

"It is very clever, Miss Maria," said her mother, endeavouring to recover her gravity, "but it won't go far, I'm afraid, towards paying Mademoiselle Amabel's bill; and as to doing it without making your father give me an extra check, it is impossible. I must ask him for the money—there is no other way of getting out of it."

"Don't, mamma!" persisted the usually volatile, but now firm-minded Maria. "*Pray* don't; if you do, you will repent it as long as you live, for you will *never* hear the last of it."

"I have not a word to say against the correctness of your statement, Maria," replied her mother, "except the just assuring you that it is as inevitable as it is true. If you know how to think as well as to talk, just set your wits to work, my dear, to invent a way of getting out of it."

"As to that, mamma," said Agatha, setting down the alarming bill, which she had been perusing with a heightened complexion,

—"as to that, you know there are, for there *must* be ways enough to manage such a matter as this, without going at the very first pinch and telling papa of it. What do you suppose all the exquisitely-dressed women in Paris do when a bill happens to run up a little higher than they expected? Can you possibly believe that they all trot off to show it to their husbands? Or that things would go on as smoothly as they seem to do now, if they did? Do you really suppose the women of Paris are such idiots?"

"Then what do you suppose they *do* do, Agatha?" returned Mrs. Roberts, who had listened to this remonstrance with considerable attention.

"Oh, as to that, mamma, there may be a variety of ways and means with which, of course, I am not likely to become acquainted; and as to any of them, you know, one can but guess."

"Well, child, and what do you guess?" said her mother, rather impatiently.

"Why, this is what I guess, mamma; when a lady finds herself, *a propos* of her milliner, exactly in the position that you are now, *a propos* of Mademoiselle Amabel, I guess, as the Yankees say, that it is to her she would apply, and not to her own husband, to ascertain what would be the easiest way of settling the affair."

"What can you mean, Agatha, by talking such abominable nonsense to me?" returned Mrs. Roberts, in a tone of great displeasure. "You may think as lightly of running in debt as you please, but I can tell you this is no time for joking, and if you don't believe me, you may ask your papa for his opinion."

"Yes, yes, I do believe you, mamma; but it seems to me that *you* must be joking, if you mean to say that I have proposed your asking Mademoiselle Amabel to pay her own bill. But she may make the paying of it comparatively easy, without lending you the money, according to the old Sheridan plan. If I had to pay the bill, I should go to the woman this morning, and take with me as much ready money from my housekeeping purse as I could conveniently spare; this I should give her, taking good care to have her receipt for it, and I should tell her, with the most perfect frankness, that her bill having come in considerably before I expected it, I could not possibly pay it directly without taking it formally in to my husband, which was what I never did with my milliner's bills if I could possibly help it. I should then add, with a gay sort of laugh, that, nevertheless, if she insisted upon having the money directly, it should be done: but that if so, I should be obliged, though I liked her style extremely, to employ another milliner, as I did not choose to be subjected to this startling style of doing business."

Mrs. Roberts listened to all this very gravely, but with an expression of countenance not quite easy to interpret. There was a mixture of admiration and surprise in it; but, in addition to this,

there was an air of being half frightened. But as she remained silent, expecting, perhaps, that her young counsellor would proceed, Maria ventured to say that what Agatha proposed appeared to her extremely reasonable, and very likely to succeed.

"Upon my word, mamma, I think that at any rate you ought to make the experiment. Just think how we were hurt and vexed last night by that horrid woman's impertinence, and do not add to it by bringing down papa upon us, about these unfortunate dresses, which, after all, you know, it would have been absolutely impossible for us to do without, if he were to take it into his head to kill us for it. Just fancy, if you please, the pretty appearance that Agatha and I should have made, had we been left to our pitiful thirty pounds per annum, at Lady Morton's and Lady Foreton's—at the embassy—at that horrid Madame de Soissonac's, and, in short, at all the places that have given us the least pleasure. So you have just got to make up your mind, mamma, as to which you think best; the being obliged to set your wits to work for a little clever management with mademoiselle, or to see us, and yourself too, turned from being people of fashion and consequence, as we are now, into vulgar humdrums, that no soul worth knowing would choose to speak to, or even look at."

The evident *savoir faire* of both her daughters certainly surprised Mrs. Roberts a good deal; but she felt that it might be, and at the present moment actually was, very useful.

"Where in the world did they get such clever thoughtful notions?" was the idea which first suggested itself to her mind; for in London, in her very gayest days, Mrs. Roberts had never been called upon to exercise her superior faculties in this sort of way; but the mental answer to the mental question was obvious—France had done it—Paris had done it. She herself felt a perfectly different creature in Paris, and no wonder the girls did so too.

"Well done, girls," said Mrs. Roberts, "you have not been three months in Paris for nothing. Great wits generally jump together, you know; and your scheme is not very much unlike what I have been thinking of myself all the time that you have been chattering. At any rate, when the carriage comes, which it will do directly, I suppose, I shall drive to Mademoiselle Amabel's, and see what I can do with her. But before I go to put on my bonnet, girls, I shall choose to say one word to you both. You must remember, my dear children, that our happening to have fallen into particularly gay and elegant society since we have been in Paris, though it may have justified, and more than justified, this little excess in the article of dress, yet I most strongly recommend economy, and the most careful avoidance of every thing like running into debt. If I did not conceive it impossible that with such a mother as myself you should ever forget this, I should be perfectly miserable—I should indeed. But I trust there is no danger of it."

As this was spoken with much solemnity, and that air of authoritative dignity which Mrs. Roberts so well knew how to assume, the two young ladies listened to her in submissive silence, and with features arranged into an expression of the most profound gravity and even deference.

The carriage did come to the door immediately, as Mrs. Roberts expected it would, but although this usually punctual lady was naturally inclined to hasten away, Miss Maria detained her long enough to say, "But remember, mamma, the best way in the world to bring Mademoiselle Amabel to terms, is to order something new; and if you do, dearest mamma, don't forget how very badly I want a new scarf. I have not one that is fit to be seen."

Mrs. Roberts only nodded in reply, and departed, but she returned very soon, apparently in excellent spirits, and generously made a present to each of her daughters of a very splendid new scarf. No more was said at that time on the subject of mademoiselle's bill, the young ladies very wisely deciding in their own minds that if their mamma wanted any more talk about it, she would take care to let them know it, and that if she did not, it would be a great pity to set her going again upon so very disagreeable a theme.

"How much will you bet, Maria," said Agatha, "that mamma never had an idea of going to mademoiselle till I put it into her head?"

"If I bet upon the subject at all," replied her sister, laughing, "it certainly would be that she had not. In the first place, I am sure of it from her manner—oh, I know mamma so well; and in the next, I am sure of it, because, with all her cleverness—and I do not mean to deny that she certainly *is* clever in her way—she has so very little notion of what women of real fashion do, either in this country or our own. And the fact is, Agatha, that if we hope to get on, as I know we should both of us like to do, we must contrive, somehow or other, to have our own way in most things, or we shall be disappointed, you may depend upon it."

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER, and another, and another day passed away, but no more was heard of Madame de Soissonac. The high spirit of the Roberts family, on which they particularly prided themselves, rose to a pitch that required, especially in the more easily exploding bosoms of the ladies, the safety-valve of vituperation, to preserve them from bursting. They had also another motive for wishing to discuss the subject with some one of their acquaintance whom they had been in the habit of meeting at the assemblies of the fair but perfidious Frenchwoman, in order to discover, beyond the possibility of mistake, whether others had received the same affront

as themselves. They doubted, however, for some time, as to the person to whom they should first open their hearts on the subject. Mrs. Bretlow would have been in many respects the most eligible person to whom they could have addressed themselves on this occasion, inasmuch as she was really intimate with Madame de Soissonac, and was therefore likely to know the real cause of her abominable behaviour. But then, this real intimacy had always appeared to be accompanied by a great deal of real affection, and it was not well to talk to anybody on the subject, who was likely to be so strongly prejudiced as Mrs. Bretlow.

"No, indeed, mamma," said Maria, "if you go to Mrs. Bretlow in order to ask her opinion of Madame Soissonac, I will not go with you. I don't know how the rest of the family may feel, but I have too much English spirit to go anywhere on purpose to hear the praises of a person who has used me ill."

"Well, then, who shall we go to?" returned her mother, who immediately felt the truth of this sensible observation. "I, for my part, don't care who it is, so that it is an English person, who will have common sense enough to understand what one says."

"Why should we not call on Lady Morton and her cousin?" said Agatha. "There cannot be two more charming people to talk to on this subject; and as they visit everybody in Paris almost, they will certainly be able to tell us, if any one can, the reason for this Frenchwoman's extraordinary conduct; and, at the same time, you know, we may be quite sure that our natural ladylike feelings on the occasion will be properly repeated everywhere."

"To be sure," exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, eagerly, "I am surprised I did not think of them at first. They are the very people for us. I wonder whether Edward would like to go with us? They always seem so delighted to see him. Do go to his room, Maria, and ask him to come into the drawing-room before he goes out. I should so like him to go with us. He grows handsomer and more elegant every day of his life. I would defy any mother not to be proud of such a son."

The young man obeyed the summons instantly, having just completed his morning costume for the Boulevards, and looking, as his mother said, like a Parisian angel, only with a lovely English colour in his cheeks.

"Edward, dearest, if you have no objection," said his respectful parent, "I should like you to go with us this morning to call on Lady Morton and Lady Foreton. Though they are, both of them, always kindness itself, they are never so delighted to see us as when you are of the party. You *will* go, won't you? We are going on purpose to talk to them a little about the impertinent behaviour of that extraordinary Madame de Soissonac, and I should like that you should be with us. What do you say to it, my dear?"

"Why no, ma'am, thank you, I think I'd rather not. For to say the truth, the Soissonacs are, in my opinion, a vast deal too absurd to talk about; and of all people in the world, I am the last who ought to enter upon the subject," said the young man, colouring. "I would rather not go, thank you."

"Good gracious—why?" said Agatha. "What can you have to do with it, Edward?"

"What can you mean, Edward?" cried Maria. "For goodness sake, speak out!"

"Upon my word, my dear, you must not go till you have explained yourself," said his mother. "Perhaps, Edward, you know a great deal more about them than we do. Do tell us everything that you have heard, my dear, dear Edward. It is cruel to keep us in the dark, if you *do* know anything. I must beg that you will hide nothing."

"Really, mother, I know very little about her, for I can't say I have ever given myself the trouble to inquire. But if you won't talk too much about it, I will tell you what I have reason to suspect; and one or two fellows of my acquaintance, who know old Soissonac a great deal better than I do, say that they are quite sure I am right. The fact is, my dear ladies—it is very absurd, you know, but I can't help it—the fact is, that Monsieur de Soissonac, the tiresome old husband of our pretty friend, has taken it into his head to be jealous of me."

"Jealous!" exclaimed all the three ladies at once. "Jealous of you, Edward?"

"Is it possible?" exclaimed his mother, after a pause, and looking at him with an eye that seemed to say, "No wonder!" And then she sighed very deeply, and added, "For heaven's sake, set my heart at ease, and tell me that he has no reason for it."

"Nonsense, ma'am!" returned the young man, in a tone of very spirited indignation. "How can you suppose that I should so far commit myself as to answer such a question as that? I alluded to the circumstance merely for the sake of doing justice to poor Madame de Soissonac. Of course you must perceive, from what I have said, though I have not violated any confidence of any kind—but of course you must perceive that *she* is not to blame. It was my duty to show this, but you must please to excuse my saying anything more on the subject. It is very wrong to ask me."

"It is very shocking, I am sure, altogether," said Agatha, looking very grave. "But I don't understand exactly how her warning us off her premises in so very impertinent a manner can do any good in the business."

"Don't you, my dear?" returned her brother, demurely, casting his eyes upon the carpet.

"No, certainly," said Maria; "on the contrary, if she is behaving as she ought to do, her best security against the injurious sus-

pitions of her husband would be the cultivating an intimacy with us. I think she is exceedingly wrong, indeed."

"Do you, my dear?" said the young man. "I am sure I am exceedingly sorry for it."

"Upon my word, Edward," said his mother, "this obstinate reserve on your part is exceedingly ill-judged, to say the least of it. How can we know, for instance, how we ought to conduct ourselves, in case we meet Madame de Soissonac accidentally? If, as Maria says, she is behaving as she ought to do, there is every reason in the world that we should treat her with kindness, feeling, as we must all do, that whether right or wrong, as to judgment, her declining our visits must be from the very best and most virtuous of motives, poor dear young woman! But if, on the contrary, Edward, there should be unhappily any real cause for her husband's suspicions, just think of the incalculable injury you may do your sisters, by letting them be seen to speak to her. For mercy's sake, my dearest Edward, trust to our discretion sufficiently to enable us to judge fairly how we ought to act."

"How very horrid!" cried one sister.

"Detestable woman!" exclaimed the other.

"I would recommend you, ma'am, not to push yourselves into any further intimacy with Madame de Soissonac—you really must excuse my being more explicit," returned Mr. Edward Roberts, looking greatly displeased with them all. "Your questions are not fair."

"I am sure that the sooner we leave Paris the better," ejaculated the mother.

"I shall not, ma'am, oppose your departure," said her son, "you may depend upon it; nor, whatever my inclinations may dictate, will I distress my family by remaining behind them; and all I require in return for this concession is, that I may not be embarrassed by any more questions."

Having pronounced these words with much more gravity than was usual with him, the young man walked out of the room.

"Oh, goodness gracious! have mercy upon us!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes towards the ceiling. "Is it not enough to break one's heart to find one's only son exposed to such temptations? So shocking, too, for his sisters to listen to it! Abominable hussy! How dreadful it is that a handsome young Englishman can't show himself in Paris without having the married women behaving in this way! It really is perfectly horrible."

"It is no good to fret about it, mamma, in that way," said Agatha. "We all know that Edward is particularly handsome, and it will be lucky for him if this is the only Frenchwoman that attacks him. I believe in my heart that they are one and all capable of it."

"Yes, yes," returned Mrs. Roberts, in a tone of less profound despair, "we all know but too well, I am afraid, what depraved creatures French women are—nor will I pretend to deny that if one could bring one's mind to say that any man's perfections could be an excuse for such abominable conduct, my son Edward is the man. But I beg you both to observe, my dears, that I don't say this with the least atom of a thought towards meaning that any such thing can be excused. We English know better. But here, to be sure, the case is altogether different. God forbid I should ever be unjust to any woman. And upon the whole, I can't say but what I think it might be, as Maria says, the surest way to stop such a report, if we, that is without Edward, of course, but if we three were to keep going on to all her balls as long as we do stay here—and perhaps the best thing I could do, after all, would be to get Lady Morton or Lady Foreton to give Madame de Soissonac a hint about it. I am sure I don't know what use it was to have those last new dresses if we don't go there—for the embassy people still mean to go on in the same impertinent way, that's quite clear. We shall never get there above once in a month at the very most. So that, on the whole, I think we owe it to ourselves not to give up Madame de Soissonac."

"At any rate," observed Agatha, "the best thing we can do now is, to try and get a good talk with Lady Morton and her cousin. We shall be sure to find out something, and it is very possible, I think, that it may end by our going without poor Edward to the Soissonac ball on Tuesday. Come, Maria, let us put on our things—the carriage will be here directly."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON reaching the splendid mansion in the Rue de Rivoli, in which the titled cousins had their very showy apartments, the Robertses had the satisfaction of being informed that they were both at home. Nevertheless, on entering the spacious drawing-room, they found no one in it, save a young girl in deep mourning, whom they had never seen before, and who seemed almost lost in its ball-room-like extent. She looked a little frightened, as if unaccustomed to the task of receiving strangers, but she rose, and begged them to be seated, in a manner which showed that she considered herself at home, and bound to do the honours of the saloon, till the mistress of it appeared. She was very young for such an office—certainly not more than seventeen, and looked younger still, from the great simplicity of her dress, and the almost childish manner in which her pretty brown hair was combed away from her face, and suffered to hang with its closely-curled ends behind her ears. Perhaps it would be impossible to hit upon a less becoming mode of arranging a young head than that exhibited by the dark-eyed stranger. The regular

features and delicate complexion, the large and brilliant eyes,—nay, even the reddest lips and whitest teeth that ever were seen, could scarcely atone for the look of naked boldness which this merciless exposure of the fair and ample forehead produced.

“I will go and tell my aunt Morton,” said the young stranger, leaving the room as soon as the party had seated themselves. The moment her slight young figure had become safely invisible by the closing of the door behind her, the mother and daughters exclaimed in chorus,

“Who in the world can this be? I never heard she had a niece.”

“Isn’t she ugly?” whispered Maria.

“Humph!” returned her mamma, to whom the question was addressed; “I am not quite sure that she is absolutely ugly. She is quite a girl, you know, as yet perfectly a child; but when she is grown up, I should not wonder if she were to be called handsome. Those eyes will tell, you may depend upon it. They are absolutely magnificent.”

“Grown up, ma’am!” returned Maria, “why, she is as tall as a house already! She is taller than Agatha, take my word for it.”

“Nonsense, Maria!” said the elder sister. “She is as thin as a whipping-post, but I am positive that she is not so tall as I am. I agree with mamma, however, now I have given her a second glance. I don’t think she *would* be so very ugly if her hair were not strained off her forehead so. And I’ll tell you what, she has the very prettiest foot I ever saw in my life. Did you look at it?”

“Yes, I did look at it,” replied her sister, with a sneer. “That is so like you, Agatha. You fancy every foot that is small must be pretty, which, as I often tell you, is the greatest mistake in the world. Any artist would tell you so. I can’t endure those little unmeaning Chinese feet. They always strike me as being much more like a deformity than a beauty. I can see no beauty in her feet, I confess.”

Before the elder Miss Roberts could reply to the artistic observation of the younger, the drawing-room door was re-opened, and Lady Foreton entered.

“My cousin will be here directly,” said her ladyship, courteously extending, first one hand and then the other, to receive the offered salutations of the Roberts family; “but at this moment she is under the hands of a mantua-maker, and cannot stir an inch.”

Either because Lady Morton was the widow of a peer, whereas her cousin Lady Foreton, was only the wife of a baronet (from whom she was separated on account of a recently-discovered incompatibility of temper), or because the income of the widow was treble that of the wife, the former lady was considered as so much the principal person in the establishment, that all visits were presumed to be made to her in the first instance. The weather having, as a matter of course, received its daily offering of observation,

Mrs. Roberts, assuming a tone of easy intimacy, said, "Who was that charming young person, Lady Foreton, whom we found here when we came in? I do not think we ever saw her before, did we? And if I mistake not, she called Lady Morton her aunt."

"No, Mrs. Roberts, I do not believe you ever saw her before; she has only been with us about a-week," replied Lady Foreton.

"A niece of Lady Morton's, is she?" returned the curious visitor.

"Yes, she is a niece of my cousin's," was the reply. "Her sister's daughter."

"Do you not reckon her very handsome, Lady Foreton? May I ask her name?" resumed the persevering Mrs. Roberts.

"Her name is Bertha Harrington," replied Lady Foreton, coldly, and without deeming it necessary, as it seemed, to enter upon any discussion concerning her beauty. Mrs. Roberts had discernment enough to perceive that whether handsome or ugly, the young lady had not the good fortune to be a favourite with her aunt's cousin, in consequence of which she proceeded to observe (as Lady Foreton was rather plump), "that to be sure it was a pity the young lady should be so lamentably thin, a defect which, in her opinion, was quite enough to destroy the effect of any beauty in the world, for there could be no softness, no roundness of con—"

But ere she could finish her speech, Lady Morton entered, followed by the thin young niece herself. Lady Morton was not only the nobler and richer lady, but she was also by much the most chatty and conversable, being, in fact, one of the greatest gossips that ever lived, and caring but little, at this period of her career, who was the listener, provided always that it was some one who thought it worth while to listen patiently. Mrs. and the two Miss Robertses were great favourites with her; for the gossip of a peeress was, in their estimation, so greatly superior in interest to any *commoner* gossip, that they all three hung upon her accents, as if they flowed from the lips of a siren. It was therefore with very fascinating cordiality that their visit was welcomed by her.

"How d'ye do, Mrs. Roberts? How d'ye do, my dears? Pretty bonnets, upon my word. Here, you see, I have got a young niece come to visit me—Miss Bertha Harrington is her name. I don't know whether your young ladies will like her. She is rather dull by way of a companion just now, that's the truth. She has just lost her mother," she added in a half whisper to Mrs. Roberts. But if it was intended to be unheard by poor Bertha, the purpose failed, which was made evident by the rush of tears which filled her eyes, and by the suddenness with which she rose from the chair in which she had placed herself, and left the room. "There she goes again, Sophy," continued Lady Morton, now addressing herself to her cousin. "Upon my honour, I shall be worn to death if she goes on so! Her mother was my own sister, the only sister

I ever had, and therefore, of course, her sudden death has naturally almost broken my heart ; and then just think, my dear Mrs. Roberts, what it has been for me, in addition to my sufferings as a sister, to have to bear with this poor weak-spirited girl, who positively never passes an hour of the day without shedding tears, more or less ; does she, Sophy ?”

“Most assuredly she does not,” replied Lady Foreton with a sneer, which spoke plainly enough the sort of sympathy which she was in the habit of bestowing on the motherless girl.

“How long we shall be able to endure it, Heaven knows,” resumed Lady Morton. “Poor Sophy bears it better than I do, for her temper is perfectly angelic ; and, God knows, I can’t charge myself with being particularly ill-tempered neither. But from my earliest childhood I have always loved nothing in the world so well as being gay and happy ; and, Heaven knows, I managed to have my little private theatre, and my public breakfasts at Richmond, and my pretty balls, kept up constantly through it all. I couldn’t have had a bad temper with such a husband as mine, to have managed in this way for years before he died, and never to have disappointed any of my friends of a single fête ; not one, I give you my honour. I could not have had a bad temper, could I ?”

“Good Heavens, no !” exclaimed both the Miss Robertses in a breath, while Mrs. Roberts, after a moment’s meditation, gravely replied, “I really do think, Lady Morton, that you too, as well as your cousin, Lady Foreton, *must* have had the temper of an angel, I do indeed.”

“Well, to say the truth, that is exactly what I have been very often told ; and I leave you to judge, Mrs. Roberts, what a person with my gay happy temper must suffer from having this poor dismal girl for ever and for ever before my eyes ! I do assure you that I believe it is killing me by inches.”

“But, my dearest Lady Morton, this must not be !” exclaimed Mrs. Roberts warmly, and delighted beyond measure at the confidential tone in which the dowager countess addressed her.

“And then just think of the utter impossibility of finding what to do with her when we go out ! Though the child is sent here already, my sister has not been dead above a fortnight, so that for the present moment you see I lose nothing, because I have no full dress mourning made ; but the dressmaker tells me that everything will be ready by to-morrow night ; and then I should like to know what is to be done with Miss Bertha ! It is enough to drive one wild !”

“Indeed, indeed, my dearest Lady Morton, I must blame you for inviting her !” said Mrs. Roberts, assuming the tone of reproving friendship. “Knowing your own charming character and constitution, how *could* you think of undertaking such a charge ?”

"God bless you, my good woman, I never did think of it," replied the dowager countess, warming in her turn into a forgetfulness of etiquette.

The Miss Robertses were a good deal shocked at hearing their mamma called a "good woman;" this feeling, however, was soon conquered, not by the feigned interest which had hitherto been their usual offering at the dowager's footstool, but from genuine curiosity, which was thoroughly awakened as she proceeded.

"Heaven knows, I might have lived a hundred years before I had ever dreamed of such a thing. But, by all I can learn from this poor blubbering girl, my sister died very suddenly—very unexpectedly indeed, and Sir Christopher Harrington, that's her husband, you know, was so horribly shocked and frightened at it, that, as well as I can understand, he gave orders to have mourning made for the child (Bertha is his only child) without an hour's delay; and, as soon as she was fairly covered with bombasin and crape, he sent her off with his lawyer and an elderly female servant, who has always waited on her, with orders to bring her to me! I am sure his grief must have made him mad, poor man, or he never would have thought of doing anything so distracted."

"Distracted and distracting!" murmured Lady Foreton, again applying her hand to her forehead, as if ready to sink.

"There it is, you see," resumed Lady Morton, "my poor dear cousin Sophy, who has devoted herself to me, and who is the greatest comfort to me, and who sets off all my parties so delightfully, looking so divinely handsome as she does when she is dressed—just think what it must be to such a temper as mine to see her overcome in that way. I *must* give a fancy ball the week after next. Everybody expects it; and I am sure I hope that your daughters will come, Mrs. Roberts, and your son also; he is really a fine-looking young man. Well, as I was saying, just imagine what my cousin Sophy will be fit for, if she is to live with this unlucky girl before her eyes from this time to that. The whole thing will be as flat as ditch-water, I know it will!"

"Would that I knew how to help you, my dear lady," said Mrs. Roberts, mournfully.

"Well, you see, that would be bad enough, wouldn't it?" resumed Lady Morton; "but what's that, I should like to know, compared to what we have got to look forward to afterwards? It is perfectly clear from what the lawyer said, that Sir Christopher expects we should keep her here; for he coolly mentioned, just as if it could be any object to me, you know, that her father had settled five hundred a-year on her, four of which was to be paid for her board; as if I should care three straws whether she paid or not. If she were a fine, handsome, lively girl, that could help us on with our parties, she might spend the whole five hundred upon

her dress, and welcome ; for we should both of us, I am sure, be glad to have her. But such a girl as that ! I really do feel that she is killing me by inches."

"My poor dear lady ! I am sure my heart aches for you !" said Mrs. Roberts, looking as dolorous as if all her own family were condemned to death by inches also.

"You are a very kind-hearted woman, Mrs. Roberts," resumed her ladyship, "and it really is a comfort to open one's heart to you ; but I cannot help laughing either, at the thoughtful slyness of Sir Christopher. What do you think of his ordering his lawyer to tell me that *in case* he did not marry again (and he is just forty years old, observe), but in case he does not marry again, this girl will have the whole of his unentailed property, amounting, the man said, to at least three thousand a-year. But I am too well off, and stand too well in Paris, to care a farthing about it. It was cleverly thought of, too, for most people would give a great deal for it, though I would not give a button."

Hitherto Mrs. Roberts had continued to listen to her illustrious friend with a well-sustained air of affectionate yet respectful interest, which really did her great credit, being precisely the aspect most likely to obtain what she wished, namely, the continuation of her ladyship's condescending familiarity, which not only gratified her feelings at the moment, but gave her a treasure of noble anecdotes, which she determined carefully to hoard up for future use. But as Lady Morton drew near to the conclusion of the speech above quoted, the eyes of Mrs. Roberts began to wander. First, they ceased to meet those of the noble speaker, and then they appeared to avoid her face altogether, till at length they finally settled themselves on the carpet, and she remained unconsciously a perfect model of meditation, and as silent as a statue. For some time after this alteration took place, the dowager countess continued to harangue, but at length she paused to take breath, a variation which seemed to rouse Mrs. Roberts from her reverie, for she instantly rose, and in rather a hurried manner began to take her leave.

Both Agatha and Maria, meanwhile, had been endeavouring, in a very praiseworthy manner, to keep on something of a conversation with the elegant Lady Foreton ; but this, though it was very hard work, had not so completely occupied their attention, as to prevent their keeping their ears on the alert, to learn in what manner their mamma would introduce the subject of Madame de Soissonac's delinquency, and what degree of information she would obtain in return. But when she rose thus suddenly, without having alluded to the subject at all, they exchanged glances, knit their brows, and looked exceedingly angry ; but, perceiving that their negligent parent was actually backing towards the door, they exchanged another glance ; and then Agatha said, in rather a

louder voice than she usually deemed proper in the presence of a countess,

"Stop one moment, mamma. I should so like to ask their ladyships if they are going to Madame de Soissonac's on Tuesday next, because we want so particularly to know."

"On Tuesday next?" returned Lady Morton. "Yes, to be sure we are, child; we always go there every Tuesday. She gives some of the best parties in Paris, and I don't care a straw for the looms. What made you ask the question, mademoiselle?"

Agatha felt that she had got herself into a scrape. She did not at all like having to say that Madame de Soissonac had warned them off; but she could not now avoid it, and therefore replied, with a little scornful laugh, that

"Madame de Soissonac appeared to have taken offence at something they had said or done, for that she had distinctly told them the evening before, that she was going to make some alterations in her parties, which would prevent her being able to receive them on Tuesday; and yet it was plain that she had not said the same to other people."

"Really!" said Lady Morton and Lady Foreton in chorus. And the eyebrows of both ladies gradually raised themselves considerably higher than usual on their foreheads. Their look and manner altogether were indeed exceedingly disagreeable to the Robertses. Their two ladyships evidently received it as a fact which admitted of no contradiction, that Madame de Soissonac intended to affront them.

"Is it not very strange?" said Agatha, her cheeks glowing with indignation.

"I don't know, I'm sure, my dear," replied Lady Morton. "Perhaps she did not like the look of your dresses last night? That would be quite enough, I promise you. She never can bear shabby dresses."

"Not like the look of our dresses!" were the words which most assuredly would have risen to the lips of each of the Robertses, had they not all been too well behaved to repeat the words of a countess in her presence. For a moment they were all silent, and then Mrs. Roberts articulated, but with a great deal of gentleness, "I don't think it could have been that."

And the poor lady remembered, not without a disagreeable twinge, that all their dresses were both new and costly, and, alas! that none of them had been paid for. The two young ladies also were a good deal disgusted, and very naturally so, at this suggestion, but they only smiled, upon which Lady Moreton rejoined, "Well, I don't know—I am sure I can't tell—it is impossible to say," concluding these satisfactory remarks with a condescending nod to each of them, adding, "Good bye—good bye—don't let us keep you standing;" which of course meant, "Don't keep me

standing"—a hint sufficiently well understood to induce Mrs. Roberts and her daughters to retreat without further ceremony.

CHAPTER IX.

THE two young ladies re-entered their carriage with feelings a good deal irritated ; but Agatha's first words, which were, " Horrid old woman ;" and Maria's first words, which were, " How I do detest that sort of pride and condescension mixed up together, so that it is impossible to tell which one is going to have !" did not receive so sympathetic a return from their mamma, as they might naturally have expected ; but the fact was, that at that moment Mrs. Roberts was so completely absorbed upon a speculation that concerned the future, that she had little or no attention left to bestow upon the present.

In a general way Mrs. Roberts was far from being reserved towards her daughters, and since their arrival in Paris this unreserve had decidedly increased, rather than diminished. But now, this delightful unreserve seemed to have vanished, for all that the poor girls could get in return for repeated bursts of the most confidential openness on their part was this, " I beg your pardon, my dears, but I really was thinking of something else, and I don't quite know what you are talking about."

" What is it, mamma ?" said Agatha.

" What is it, mamma ?" said Maria.

But this question, direct as it was, did not help them a bit ; for though Mrs. Roberts did not look the least angry, the smile which she gave, first to one and then to the other, in return, was of so very vacant and unmeaning a character, as more to increase their uncertainty than to remove it. But whatever the young ladies might think of it, their mamma did not deserve to be accused of caprice. She really had a great deal to think of, and that too of an extremely important kind.

The situation of Mrs. Roberts at this time was certainly one of some difficulty and embarrassment. Though the ready wit of her daughters, acting upon her own sagacious judgment, had relieved her from the sudden difficulty produced by the demand of Mademoiselle Amabel, Mrs. Roberts had received and paid too many bills in the course of her life, not to feel, in the very midst of her triumph at getting rid of the dun, that the relief was but temporary. Moreover, though she did not think it necessary to tease the poor girls by talking about it, Mademoiselle Amabel's account was not the only one which lay concealed in the recesses of her writing-desk. The elegant Edward had not reached the pinnacle on which he stood, as one of the best-dressed Englishmen that walked the Boulevards, without having been obliged to ask his proud mother for a little assistance, which assistance had been given, not only in

the shape of all the ready money she could spare, but also by her telling him that if he would leave *one* of his tailor's bills with her, she would take care, somehow or other, to get it paid before very long. She could not help recollecting sometimes, with rather an uncomfortable consciousness, that the butter and cream bill had been suffered to run on a good while, and also that Mr. Roberts had given her money expressly to pay a wine bill, which she had quite forgotten, and suffered the money to melt away out of her fingers, she really did not know for what. But there was something a great deal worse than all this, which weighed upon the mind of Mrs. Roberts. Could she quietly have gone into prison for these troublesome little debts, without anybody's knowing anything about it, she would have suffered absolutely nothing, in comparison to what she sometimes endured now, when she thought what little chance there was that she should ever get clear of them without confessing their existence to Mr. Roberts. This idea tormented her perpetually, and the more so, of course, because she would not indulge herself with the relief of confiding it to her daughters. Why was it then, that although nothing in the world had occurred to alter this position of things, and although she had all the vexation of Madame de Soissonac's offensive conduct, and the unceremonious commentary of the Ladies Morton and Foreton upon it, to add to her annoyances—why was it that her countenance expressed so very benign a degree of satisfaction? It was not for nothing, gentle reader. Mrs. Roberts had that morning heard enough to occupy her mind by night and by day for some time to come, without leaving her any leisure to recur to her trumpery little debts, excepting just to remember, perhaps, what a great pleasure it would be to get rid of them.

"Why," thought Mrs. Roberts, "why should not I step forward at this critical moment, and offer to relieve my excellent friend Lady Morton of the troublesome guardianship of her niece? As to her mourning and her moaning, it could not possibly produce the slightest inconvenience to me. I should not be called an unfeeling sister because I did not mourn and moan with her. Four hundred a year! More than half as much again as we have got now! It would be perfectly impossible that we could go wrong with that—perfectly! And then the contingency! Let any woman look at Edward—any woman in the world, rich or poor, old or young, and see if she can do it without feeling at her heart that he is the handsomest man she ever saw. Living with him, too, actually living under the same roof with him! I will defy her to help herself, poor girl; there can be no doubts or fears about that part of the business. And even if her father, Sir Christopher, *should* marry, and it *should* turn out that she would never have anything beyond her present five hundred a-year, I should still be delighted with the match. The connexion, with our high spirit

and superior sort of feeling on those subjects, would perfectly reconcile us all to the marriage, even though her father were to have half-a-dozen sons. Our calling on that proud old woman to-day was perfectly providential." Now then, who will wonder at Mrs. Roberts looking pleased, despite of all the troubles which beset her? Or who can blame her if, with such occupation for her thoughts, she did not pay any great attention to what her daughters were talking about?

Few women, in any station of life, had ever attained a more thoroughly independent situation in their domestic circle than Mrs. Roberts. Nobody, not even Edward, unless he pretended to be half in joke, ever ventured to contradict her. Mr. Roberts, as far as he was concerned, knew that he had a great deal better not. Neither were her daughters at all more restive under the yoke which her principles of domestic discipline led her to put upon them, than she was at all times ready to forgive upon due submission on their parts. Yet, notwithstanding the admirable simplicity of the machinery which regulated all the more important movements of the Roberts family, by which one main spring did everything, without any perplexing complication of action from minor ones—notwithstanding this admirable arrangement, there were now and then circumstances which, like the present, required the acquiescence of the titular master of the family to be publicly expressed in order to bring the business to perfection. But not for this was the heartfelt contentment of Mrs. Roberts the less perfect. She knew her power, and if there was something of almost nervous hurry in the manner in which, on returning home, she sought her husband, it was not from any agitating doubt as to how her proposal might be taken, but solely from eagerness to be *doing* in a business, from the accomplishment of which she anticipated such delightful results.

Mr. Roberts had an old English newspaper before him when she entered the room where he was sitting, but he was more than half asleep over it, and started when roused to consciousness by his wife, who laid her hand upon his shoulder as she approached him, giving him a gentle shake.

"Oh! is it you, my dear?" he exclaimed. "I do believe I was dreaming, for I fancied I heard old Smithson, our head clerk, complaining that the balance sheet didn't show off so well as it ought to do. Only think of my dreaming that, my dear!"

"But you must be wide awake now, Mr. Roberts, to listen to what I have got to say to you," said his wife, in an accent which showed plainly enough that the promised communication was to be received as extremely agreeable. "And most thankful you ought to be, Mr. Roberts," she added solemnly, "that neither your prosperity, nor that of your family, depends any longer upon Mr. Smithson and his balance-sheet. I think I have something to tell

you that will convince you at last, my dear, that the wisest thing you ever did in your life, was letting me have my own way about giving up that terribly slow-coach, the banking concern, and coming to a country where my knowledge of the world, and my unceasing anxiety to improve the position of my family, can be turned to account."

"Have either of the girls had an offer?" cried Mr. Roberts eagerly.

"Nonsense, Mr. Roberts! You really need not trouble yourself to be in any fuss about their marrying. Such girls as mine, with a mother to take care of them, who tolerably well knows what she is about, are not very likely to encumber their father's house too long. No, sir, I have something better than that for you," said Mrs. Roberts, seating herself in an arm-chair opposite to him, resting her elbows on its arms, and looking at him with a countenance perfectly radiant with satisfaction.

"Well, sir," began Mrs. Roberts, as soon as she had finished her jocose examination of her husband's grave face, "though you do look so very solemn, I suppose you do not intend to deny that we are living with a great deal more enjoyment, and amongst a very much better set of acquaintance, than we ever did before?"

"Oh, yes, my dear," replied her husband; "it is quite certain that we none of us ever went out into company so much before; and as to titles, and all that sort of finery, of course there is no comparison. I am only afraid sometimes, my dear, that there may be a little too much of it—not for pleasure I don't mean, for I am sure it is quite delightful to see you all enjoying yourselves so—talking French all of you, like natives, which must be such an improvement. So of course I am not afraid of all that. But I can't help thinking sometimes that it must be impossible for you, my dear Sarah, to save quite so much money as you intended. The table is certainly very economical, I can't deny that, and it does you great credit, I am sure, very great credit; but it is the carriage, which you know is always going on, and the beautiful dresses, all of which it is quite a pleasure to see, if it was not that I do sometimes feel half afraid, my dear, that you must be putting your good management to some inconvenience about it. But though this does sometimes come into my head, I soon satisfy myself again, by recollecting how quite impossible it is that, with your management, you ever should get into any real trouble about money."

Mrs. Roberts did certainly feel uncomfortable for about half-a-minute as she listened to this very civil speech, but she rallied again directly, and replied,

"Keep yourself easy, sir, I beg, about money matters; as long as you choose to confide them to me, they can never go very far wrong, you may depend upon it; and what I am going to say now is a proof of it. You are not altogether out, Mr. Roberts, in fancy-

ing that a handsome carriage, like ours, is not kept for nothing. Neither can I dress my girls as I do, in a style that gives them such a decided superiority over almost everybody they meet, without paying for it. Edward too, dear fellow, can't go naked; and you must know as well as I do, that it is not his little morsel of an allowance that can enable him to keep himself decent; and Heaven knows that it is not the scrimping mite of an income, which was all that you could contrive to squeeze out of your stupid business, that can do to keep up things as they are now. It is impossible to form intimate friendship with peeresses and that sort of people, and yet go on dressing like a kitchen-maid. You may put the question yourself to anybody you like."

"Then what can we do, my dear Sarah?" cried the worthy man, exceedingly alarmed. "If the income won't do, what is to become of us?"

"Why, really, sir, I believe you would find it rather difficult to get out of the difficulty if you had not a wife to help you. But if you will have the condescension to give me leave, I will tell you what you must do. My friend, Lady Morton, has been opening her heart to me respecting her charming niece, the daughter of Sir Christopher Harrington, his only daughter and heiress, you know. Dear Lady Morton has been all but asking me if we will take her with an allowance of four hundred a-year for her board and other expenses. Now this, you see, my dear, would not only make everything perfectly easy on the score of money—for four hundred a-year makes an immense difference—but it will be such a monstrous advantage to the girls in point of connexion. And who knows, Roberts, what may be the end of it? Who knows whether Edward and Miss Bertha Harrington may not like one another? She is quite young, in fact, almost a child, and therefore it must be, in a great measure, in our power to make her understand by degrees, that Edward is not only the handsomest, but by far the most amiable and excellent young man she can ever hope to meet with. And just think, my dear—only fix your mind for a few minutes upon the real facts of the case, Roberts. Five hundred a-year certain, and she the daughter of a baronet. If this were all, it seems to me that we might really be pretty tolerably contented. What do you think about it, Mr. Roberts?"

"Think about it, Sarah? Why I think that if I could live to see him make such a marriage as that, I should be content to die the day after."

"Then what should you say, I wonder, if I was to tell you that this five hundred a-year, certain, is no more than the sixth part of what this young lady will have in all human probability? What would you say to that, my good man?"

"What would I say to it? Oh! my dear Sarah, I am afraid

that I should say it was too much—too much for us to hope that we could have anything to do with it. But nevertheless, my dear, I should like, if you please, to hear everything about it. That, you know, can do no harm to any one.”

“No, Mr. Roberts, I should think not. I never found that knowing and understanding everything, which is my general way of going on, ever did me, or anybody connected with me, harm, but rather the contrary, as I flatter myself you will allow. I have taken care, sir, to know and to understand everything in the least degree important about this young lady and her fortune. She has five hundred per annum at present, Mr. Roberts, four of which her father has arranged for her, poor, young, motherless thing! shall be paid for her accommodation in any family where she may happen to reside; the fifth hundred will be left in her own hands for dress, washing, travelling, doctors’ bills, and other incidental expenses.”

“God bless my soul, Sarah! What a wonderful woman you are to be sure!” exclaimed Mr. Roberts, in a burst of genuine admiration. “Not one single thing, as you truly say, but what you have contrived to find out—that is, I mean, not any single thing that signifies. Now all that about the washing and the doctors’ bills is so really important, and puts everything on such a clear footing, that it is worth almost any money in a business of this kind.”

“Of course it is, Mr. Roberts, or I should never have given myself the trouble of remembering it,” replied the lady.

“But I think, my dear, you were going to be kind enough to explain all about that six times five hundred. Five sixes are thirty—three thousand a-year, that is. What were you going to say about that, Mrs. Roberts?”

“I was merely going to mention the fact that Bertha Harrington will have three thousand a-year at the death of her father, for she is his only child; and that if his death should take place without his marrying again, she might certainly be considered, in point of fortune, as well as birth, an excellent match for Edward.”

“An excellent match for Edward!” repeated Mr. Roberts, raising his spread hands towards the ceiling; “how cool and quiet you do talk of it, to be sure! Why, my dear, just think what it would be, returning to England after such a match as that! Think how the Pearsons would look, and the Rigtos! Oh, the Rigtos, Sarah, would be better than all, because they did use to come over us so, about their cousin, Lady Thomas. Should you not enjoy going back to England in such an event as that, Mrs. Roberts?”

“Certainly, Mr. Roberts, it would be highly creditable to us, there is no doubt of it; nor much doubt either, in my opinion, that if she does come to live with us, the thing will take place. I know Edward, and indeed, for that matter, I know myself too, and that what I may have lost in youthful looks since I was the beauty of

Fulham, I have gained in knowledge of the world. Between you and I, Mr. Roberts, it would be rather a remarkable thing if a young girl like Bertha Harrington could live in the house with Edward, and his mother into the bargain, and leave it in any other way than as his wife. But of course, my dear, you must not say a word about the marriage just at present, not even to Edward himself, remember. The first object must be our getting her to become a member of our family. That is all we have to think about now."

Mr. Roberts, his eyes fixed upon his lady's face, and opening wider and wider at every word she spoke, paused for several seconds after she had ceased to speak, as if fearful of losing a syllable, and then exclaimed, "Mrs. Roberts, if you do really manage to get this high young lady to lodge and board in our family, I shall truly think, and truly say, to the very last hour of my life, that you ARE one of the cleverest women, if not the very cleverest, that ever lived. For now, my dear, without cockering ourselves up too much with your sort of certain hope and expectation that our Edward will marry her—even without this beautiful conclusion, I can't but say that I should consider the securing such a boarder just now as about the very best thing that could happen to us. Such a boarder as that, Mrs. Roberts, would be the saving of us."

"Such a *boarder*! For goodness sake, sir, leave off that horrid vulgar phrase. A boarder, indeed! I do really believe that if all preliminaries were settled, and the day fixed on which this dear young creature was to enter our house as a member of our family, Lady Morton and Lady Foreton would both feel so dreadfully disgusted at the word *boarder*, that the whole negotiation would be broken off."

"Oh dear! oh dear! oh dear!" cried Mr. Roberts, closing his fists, and raising them on each side to the level of his head, as if they were two hammers, with which he was going to execute justice upon his offending brains; "oh dear! oh dear! oh dear! You must gag me, Mrs. Roberts, you must indeed."

"Mr. Roberts," replied his lady, with a degree of dignity that, to do her offending husband justice, he really felt from head to foot; "Mr. Roberts, it will not do for anybody in the situation in society which my husband ought to fill, and, indeed, must fill, it will not do for him, sir, to live with a gag upon his mouth. But if you really wish not to undo everything that I have done, you will be pleased to speak of this young lady as a beloved guest. Her name is Bertha, Mr. Roberts, and we may, and indeed we must, all call her Bertha; for, unless we immediately assume this sort of style with her, our position in society will be altogether lost, and I would not give a single farthing for Edward's chance of marrying her, or for our two poor girls' chance of marrying any-

body. Everything depends upon this, sir; and I should think that even you might have wit enough to see it. What becomes of the advantage of our intimacy with all her titled relations if everybody that sees her with us is to be told that she is our boarder? Answer me only that one question, Mr. Roberts, if you please."

"My dear, I can't answer you," replied Mr. Roberts. "There is one thing, however, that I will say, because in that nobody can contradict me. I will say that, though I often talk like a fool, there was once in my life that I acted like a wise man, and that was, when I married you, my dear. I hope nobody will put a gag on me when I want to say that."

Mrs. Roberts acknowledged this civility by a bow and a smile, and then went on to explain her intentions for the future. "As soon as this matter is settled, Roberts, I shall be for leaving Paris and going to Baden Baden. The season here, you know, must be very soon drawing to a close, and no people of real fashion ever stay anywhere after invitations begin to grow slack. Besides, as I could easily make you understand if I had time, there are many other reasons which would make our leaving Paris desirable, when we have got dear Bertha Harrington with us. In the first place, there would be something extremely disagreeable in having Lady Morton and Lady Foreton for ever spying to find out whether Edward was beginning to be attentive to her, and all sorts of curious peeping besides; and in the next place, Roberts, it will be quite as well, after we leave Paris, that you should call her your ward. This sounds respectable in every way, and when there are no people near who are likely to know much about her, or to ask any troublesome questions, there cannot possibly be any objection to it. But, let us be where we will, Mr. Roberts, don't, for mercy's sake, go about talking of our having engaged a young lady to come and board with us."

"No, my dear, I will not," replied Mr. Roberts, with the unmistakeable air of being very much in earnest. "You may quite and entirely depend that I will not, for I give you my word that now you have pointed it out to me, I see perfectly well what you mean, and I am altogether of your opinion about it. I see as plainly as possible that it does not sound as it ought to, and I ought to be thankful for always having one near me who can so well set me right when I am wrong. But do tell me one thing more, my dear, will you? Did her ladyship, downright and *bonâ fide*, as we say, did she *bonâ fide* propose that this rich young lady, her niece, should come and live with us?"

Although Mrs. Roberts was at that moment in a very particularly good humour, she could not prevent a slight degree of scorn from showing itself both in her look and manner, as she prepared to reply to this question. She had, however, not the least in-

clination to quarrel with Mr. Roberts—quite the contrary ; and she therefore conquered her feelings sufficiently to answer without any appearance of rudeness.

“No, sir, she did not ; and, to tell you the truth, my poor dear Mr. Roberts,” she added, after pausing a moment, “to tell you the truth, my dear, I certainly think that if she had, I must, in justice to myself, have refused her flatly, however well I might like the arrangement, if brought about in a proper, ladylike manner. But for Lady Morton to have addressed such a proposal to me would have been taking a most unwarrantable liberty—a liberty which I truly believe she would not have ventured to take with me for any consideration that could be offered her.”

“Now then, my dear love, I must beg you to have the kindness to explain all this to me,” replied Mr. Roberts, looking, as he felt, poor man, most completely out of his depth. “I cannot comprehend why her ladyship should be afraid of paying you such a very flattering compliment.”

“A compliment, indeed ! But it is no good to be vexed at such nonsense. Now don’t fancy I am angry, Mr. Roberts ; I do assure you I am not ; only it is impossible to help being surprised at such very odd notions. The truth I suspect is, my dear, that you do not quite appreciate the place I hold in society. I should have thought, Roberts, that you had known me well enough by this time, to be aware that I lay claim to other sorts of distinction besides that of being your wife, my dear.”

“To be sure, Mrs. Roberts, I do know it, and I don’t see very well how I could help knowing it,” he replied, with the very least little twinkle of a smile in his eyes ; “but, spite of that, I don’t quite catch the reason why your dear friend, Lady Morton, should be so terribly afraid to speak to you, especially when what she had got to say was so very agreeable.”

“It is quite in vain, my dear friend,” returned Mrs. Roberts with a sigh, “totally and entirely in vain, to attempt making you comprehend all the little niceties of high-bred manners and of high-bred people. Lady Morton’s *proposing* to me that her niece should come and make part of my family would be something absolutely insulting. No, sir, if we do make up our minds to think such a thing desirable, the only possible way in which it can be brought about will be by my offering to do them this great and most important service as a friend ; confessing, however, frankly, at the same time, that one great reason for my doing so, independent of my affection for them, arises from my wish of securing for my own dear girls so eligible a companion. This is the way, sir, in which these sort of things are always done among real ladies and gentlemen.”

“Yes, to be sure, my dear, I see it all now,” replied Mr. Roberts, laughing. “There is a proverb, you know, that goes to it exactly, ‘the truth is not at all times to be spoken.’ Doi exactly

in your own way, and then, of course, I know it will be well done. Do it your own way, my dear, from first to last."

"That is all that I ever wish or desire, my dear Mr. Roberts," said she, with a pleasant, good-humoured smile, "and depend upon it I will set about the negotiation with all convenient speed, and, if nobody interferes with me, I don't feel the least doubt but that I shall bring it to a favourable termination. Meanwhile, my dear, I must trouble you to give me another check for a hundred pounds. There are a good many little things that dear Edward and the girls cannot do any longer without, besides several small house-keeping bills that the people neglected to send in last week. Here's your check-book, dear, and here's the pen and ink."

"Why, my dear Mrs. Roberts, this is the seventh. It is, upon my word and honour, Mrs. Roberts, this is the seventh hundred I have drawn for since we left London," replied the frightened husband. "It is a great comfort, to be sure, the knowing that you pay ready money for everything, but yet, my dear, you must see that it will be impossible for us to go on in this way. I can't bear to refuse you, as long as I know there is any money left. But, upon my word and honour, we must not go on so."

"And pray, sir, what have I been saying to you for the last hour? Have I not been showing you, as plain as that the sun is in the heaven, that I do *not* mean to go on in this way; or, in other words, that what I do mean is to make your poor little income half as much again as it is at present? Have you understood me, Mr. Roberts, or have you not?" said his wife, with some appearance of displeasure.

Mr. Roberts sighed; but he took up the pen, did with it as he had been desired to do, and only said, as he presented the check to his lady, "I hope, my dear, that it won't be inconvenient to my lady to let the young heiress come to us immediately."

CHAPTER X.

MRS. ROBERTS certainly began to feel that, if she hoped to sustain her reputation for being the very best and cleverest manager that the world ever saw of all pecuniary as well as other matters, it would be necessary to lose as little time as possible, in bringing to perfection her scheme for obtaining the agreeable society of Miss Bertha Harrington for her daughters. She suffered, therefore, but one day to intervene between her last visit to Lady Morton, and the very important one which was to decide the success of her scheme. She left her two daughters in the carriage, having previously explained to them her plan, and also in part the urgent necessity for it, and then mounted the stairs with a beating heart. She had, however, a comfortable and sustaining confidence in her own powers; and felt, as she entered the drawing-room, that her

courage rather increased than diminished, as the moment for profiting by it approached. Unfortunately, however, she did not find Lady Morton alone; her dearly beloved cousin Sophy being seated beside her, reading scraps from Galignani's paper of the day, while her young niece was stationed at a table at the bottom of the room, with an open book in her hand, which, however, she did not appear to be reading, as her eyes were earnestly fixed upon the wall before her. This she of course felt would not do at all; and having gone through all her most graceful evolutions, in the way of easy Parisian morning gossiping, she lowered her voice to a whisper, addressed exclusively to Lady Morton, and said, "May I ask to have two minutes' private conversation with your ladyship?"

Lady Morton opened her eyes with a stare expressive of much more astonishment than satisfaction, and repeating the word "private?" interrogatively, seemed to await a little further explanation, before she ventured to accede to the request. Nobody could have understood better than Mrs. Roberts did, that both the word and the accent implied a double doubt; first, as to her own right to make the request; and, secondly, as to her ladyship's inclination to grant it; and nothing could give stronger evidence of the high value which Mrs. Roberts put upon the esteem and consideration of her own family, than the fact that her first sensation on recovering this rebuff was one of gladness that no Roberts had heard it but herself.

"Do not for a moment mistake me, my dearest lady!" she exclaimed, looking at the dowager countess with eyes that seemed almost in an act of adoration from profound respect; "do not suppose it possible that I do not feel that this request would be perfectly unwarrantable, did it not concern your ladyship more than it does myself."

"Oh! well, I don't want to slip out of business; though it always is a bore to such a temper as mine," replied her ladyship; "and it is not an easy matter you see, just at first, Mrs. Robson—Mrs. Roberts, I mean—it is not quite easy just at first to guess what you *can* have to do with any private business of mine. As to my getting up, and trotting about the rooms, in order to find a place for you to talk secrets in, I can't do it—indeed I *cannot*, Mrs. Roberts; but I'll send the child out of the room, if that is what you want. My cousin Sophy's secrets and mine are all one and the same, so she need not stop you. Shall I send the child away?"

Mrs. Roberts bowed, and smiled a most cordial, well-pleased acquiescence, though she really would have been inexpressibly delighted could she have found at the moment any feasible method of despatching the Lady Foreton, either to the bright regions of the moon, or to the darkest cave at the bottom of the ocean—she would have cared not a farthing which. But as both

were alike impossible, she was obliged to reconcile herself to the exceedingly disagreeable necessity of enduring the unremitting stare of her ladyship's great black eyes, which always seemed to come on duty with as impressive a steadiness as the equestrian sentinels at Whitehall, whenever anything in the least degree important was addressed to her cousin.

Upon receiving this signal of acquiescence from her mysterious visitor, Lady Morton said, in a loud and imperious tone, "Go to your own room, Bertha Harrington."

The command was instantly obeyed : and then, very greatly to the satisfaction of Mrs. Roberts, who was beginning to feel a little nervous about her negotiations, Lady Morton exclaimed,

"If you have got an atom of feeling in you, Mrs. Roberts, you must pity me about that wet blanket of a girl. In your whole life, now, did you ever see a creature look and move as she does ? It would be bad enough, I dare say, for anybody high or low, rich or poor, but think what it must be to me ! But it is no good to talk of it to you, or to anybody else who does not live in my own style, and who does not know what it is to have gone on as I have done with every living soul, taking care that I should not be plagued. I believe there are some people that don't mind it. Everybody is not made alike, you know, it is folly to fancy it ; and Sir Christopher Harrington deserves to be burnt for daring to torment me in this way."

These words, though uttered in the sharpest possible key, fell like balm on the spirit of Mrs. Roberts, and seemed to render the undertaking so delightfully easy, that she sat exhibiting her satisfaction by a smile that became more bland and more broad every moment, despite the increasing asperity of the gay-hearted dowager. During the first part of her ladyship's speech, her ladyship's eyes had been fixed upon the tapestry portrait of her favourite dog, which she was assiduously working in a large frame that stood before her, but at length condescending to raise her eyes to the person she addressed, and whose private business, by the way, she had utterly forgotten, she perceived the strangely inappropriate expression of her countenance ; and, stopping short for a moment, staring at her with her needle suspended, and with rather an alarming frown upon her brow, she said, "What in the world may you be smiling and simpering at, I should like to know ? There is no accounting for difference of tastes, my good madam ; but my cousin Sophy and myself, I believe, think this young lady's arrival rather a crying than a laughing matter."

"My dearest Lady Morton !—my dearest Lady Foreton !" exclaimed the frightened Mrs. Roberts in reply, "I should break my heart—I should indeed !—I am quite sure I should break my heart, if you could either of you think me capable of smiling at what must naturally make you both feel so very far from pleased.

I did smile, I am quite aware of that; I did smile, my dear ladies; and the cause for which I smiled was, that my sole and only reason for coming here this morning was in the hope that I had thought of something which might perhaps relieve you from your disagreeable difficulties about this poor, melancholy-looking young lady. I could not help smiling, as I thought that perhaps I might have the exceeding great good luck and happiness of being useful to you."

"How, ma'am?" returned Lady Morton, rather drily. "I confess that I can't very well see what use you are likely to be of to me in this matter."

These words were by no means encouraging in themselves; but the commentary which Mrs. Roberts' sharp glance caught from the eyes of Lady Foreton was less so still, for they expressed both ridicule and pride, with a degree of distinctness which proved them to be very fine eyes indeed. Had poor Mrs. Roberts been as free from embarrassments at that moment as she had been six months or so before, she would probably have grown exceedingly red in the face as she looked and listened, and would have made a sudden and indignant exit, notwithstanding the imposing rank and station of her companions. But now, poor woman, she would as soon have thought of boxing their honourable ears, as of manifesting, in the very least degree, her annoyance. To Lady Foreton indeed she did endeavour to turn a blind eye, but it never entered her head to attempt turning a deaf ear to her more important cousin. Very judiciously changing her own aspect from gay to sentimental, she replied, "I am not at all surprised to hear you say so, Lady Morton; for few things could appear less likely, than that such an idea as I have now called upon you to communicate should ever have entered my head. But you are not aware, dear lady, I am quite sure that you are not aware, how deeply impressive your manner is, when you describe your own feelings! I saw, and I felt to my fingers' ends, the sort of heavy, dragging weight which this unfortunate young lady's arrival had thrown upon you; and when I went home, I could not help saying to myself, again and again, that it was one of the most perverse and unlucky things that ever happened; for that ninety-nine people out of a hundred might have had the very same thing happen to them, without caring three straws about it; while to your ladyship, it seemed positively like putting an extinguisher upon the very brightest candle in the world."

The simile was a very happy one, and Lady Morton felt it to be so. She smiled, and nodded at her cousin till the beautiful flaxen ringlets which depended from beneath her blonde cap danced as it were, with satisfaction.

"That is true, Sophy, isn't it, let who will have said it?" she

observed ; and then added, " You could not have hit the truth better, my good friend, if you had been King Solomon, or the Queen of Sheba either. It is an extinguisher, and put out I shall be, as sure as you sit there to say it, unless I can find some means of throwing it away before I am turned to snuff. So now you may go on if you will ; and you need not be afraid to tell us whatever may have come into your head about it. Whether it turns out to be wisdom or folly, it can't do any harm, if we choose to take the trouble of listening to it."

" Heaven forbid I should do any harm, when I really wish to do nothing but good," replied Mrs. Roberts, with a sort of grave propriety of manner, that seemed to bespeak attention and respect, whether what she were about to say were approved or not. " It has occurred to me, Lady Morton," she continued, " that I might, without the slightest inconvenience to myself, be of use to you in this matter. As the mother of two daughters, just introduced into society, I have naturally laid aside all thoughts of amusement for myself, and am devoted wholly and solely to them. This being the case, the having a third young person to watch over, and take into company, would be positively no evil at all. My introductions here, and indeed at every court in Europe, are of the very best and most influential kind ; and as it is our intention to show our children, before marriage shall have clipped their young wings, all that is best worth seeing throughout the fashionable world, we should really consider it rather an advantage than otherwise, to have just such an addition to our party as your niece, Miss Harrington. My girls are still, in the most praiseworthy manner, pursuing their various accomplishments ; and it would be an encouragement and a pleasure to them, to have a companion in their studies. We shall leave Paris on a tour to Baden-Baden, in a very few days, after which we shall proceed to Italy ; and if your ladyship will entrust your young relation to my care, I shall have much pleasure in undertaking the charge."

Mrs. Roberts ceased, and the two Ladies Morton and Foreton looked at each other steadily for a minute or two. A twinge of feeling, not very strong indeed, but in which something, a little approaching to a conscientious doubt, made a part, caused this unusual suspension of speech in the elder lady. The younger one was silent, because she chose that her cousin should speak first ; and because, in fact, she had no intention of pronouncing any opinion on the subject at all, unless she found it necessary to do so, in order to obtain what she was quite determined should be the final result ; such, indeed, being the invariable custom of the Lady Foreton, who detested the burden of responsibility almost as much as she liked having in all things her own way, and never interfered in any of Lady Morton's arrangements, unless she perceived

some reason to fear that they were not precisely such as she approved. Then came the word in good time, which invariably settled the question as she chose that it should be settled.

So the Lady Foreton waited patiently for the Lady Morton to speak, equally certain that whether she said yes or no, Bertha Harrington would very speedily disappear.

"I am sure it is very obliging of you, Mrs. Roberts, very obliging indeed," said Lady Morton, at length; "and I really do not see any reason why we should not think about it. That, you know, can't do any harm to either of us in any way. Wise people, I have heard, always do think about things before they reject, as well as before they accept, an offer. And I see no reason, I am sure, why my cousin and I should not set ourselves to think a little about what you have been so obliging as to propose. There is no great hurry, I imagine. We need not decide to-day, nor to-morrow either, I suppose? It is a sort of thing that of course you know one ought to be very cautious about."

It may be doubted whether amidst all the numerous variety of sayings and doings which might have entered Lady Morton's head on the subject of handing over the guardianship of her niece to a family of perfect strangers, anything could possibly have occurred to her so likely to bring the affair to an immediate conclusion, as this mention of delay. Had she talked of refusing the proposal altogether, her steadfast-minded cousin, Sophy, could have endured it with perfect composure, quite certain that a very few words from her would cause it to be accepted in defiance of pretty nearly any obstacle that could possibly arise; but at this mention of delay, she was terrified. It affected her nerves, as the hearing preparations for applying the rack might affect those of a prisoner who knew himself for a time in the power of an enemy, though his ultimate release was sure; and, determined to avoid the only evil which still seemed to threaten her, she said, with an air of ripe decision, which seemed to be the result of the most mature deliberation—

"If you will take my advice, cousin, you will not suffer any delay whatever to intervene between the proposal of this plan and the acceptance of it. Your niece is falling into habits of such pernicious ill-humour and idleness, that, in my judgment, every hour is of importance. You are not aware what habit is to a mind of that class. Mrs. Roberts has shown herself a woman of great good sense in considering, when making this proposal, the very great advantage to her own daughters of having a companion in their studies. I really do not see how you can justify it to yourself to keep this miserable, melancholy, idle girl here for a single hour longer, when you have the power of placing her with cheerful young ladies, who will soon cure both her melancholy and her idleness by their example. Of course, you must do as you like,

my dear cousin, but I really have said thus much from a sense of duty."

"It is just like yourself, cousin Sophy," replied Lady Morton, looking excessively comforted; "and I do not believe there is a woman in the world so well calculated in every way to give advice as you are. So then, my dear, good Mrs. Roberts, I will venture to say at once that you are quite welcome to have Bertha, by way of a trial, if you like it. I had better say trial, you know, cousin Sophy, because that always leaves one the power to change if desirable, and it may be better, too, in the writing about it to Sir Christopher."

"There can be no objection to your calling it a trial if you like it," replied Lady Foreton, with a quiet little smile, "and I don't think Sir Christopher is the least likely to be troublesome to you by his over-anxiety."

"No, indeed! good-for-nothing, impertinent man," returned the countess; "I don't believe he cares a straw about her; but, nevertheless, you know it will be necessary for us to write something."

"There will be no great difficulty in doing that," replied Lady Foreton, "and I should therefore say that your best plan would be to fix the day and hour of the young lady's departure immediately."

To say that Mrs. Roberts was pleased is a very weak phrase by which to describe her sensations, and yet she was not altogether satisfied. A disagreeable doubt had crossed her brain as to the terms on which this unwelcome niece was to be disposed of; and the Lady Foreton seemed to be driving on at so vehement a pace towards the conclusion of the affair, that she felt there was no time to be lost in making it understood that the advantage of the companionship to her daughters was not quite the only remuneration she expected for taking the troublesome young lady off their hands. Nevertheless, it went to her very heart to do anything likely to check the rapid progress of an affair which she so anxiously wished to conclude, and it was therefore with evident reluctance that she said,

"We shall be quite ready to receive the poor, dear, melancholy young lady whenever it suits you to send her; but Sir Christopher must of course be aware that the father of a large family, though certainly a man of very good fortune, would not be justified in making such an arrangement as this without a proper remuneration."

"Good gracious me, Mrs. Roberts!" exclaimed Lady Morton, "do you really suppose that we meant to ask you and your husband to take in my niece, and Sir Christopher Harrington's daughter, upon charity? I should like to know how such an idea as that could have entered your head?"

"No, indeed, your ladyship, it never did enter my head,"

replied the frightened Mrs. Roberts. "I only thought that in all matters of business it was best to let everything be quite clearly understood."

"Oh dear, yes, ma'am—quite right—perfectly right beyond all doubt—that if you fancied there was any danger you should guard against it. But all this is nonsense and folly," added her ladyship, with sudden impatience. "I think you heard me say the other day that her father allowed her five hundred a-year. You may just take it and make the most of it—only taking care, if you please, that the girl is not left without having money enough in her pocket to dress herself decently. You must let her have one hundred out of the five for that, if you please to remember, and as for the other four hundred, you may set up a coach-and-six with it, if you like; and never alarm yourself or your family with any fears that I should wish to pilfer any part of it."

And here Lady Morton laughed a little, and Lady Foreton laughed a little too; and Mrs. Roberts hardly knew whether to be most glad or most sorry that she had said anything about the money at all. However, this doubtful state of mind was very speedily changed for self-congratulation and self-applause, when, having taken her leave, with the understanding that Miss Harrington was to come to her before dinner on the following day, she once more found herself sitting opposite to her two anxious daughters in the carriage that was to convey her and her news to her admiring husband.

CHAPTER XI.

THE two young ladies, who had been prettysufficiently frightened by their mamma's confidential revelations relative to the state of her debts and resources, hailed her, and the information she brought, with a great deal of charming young enthusiasm, and listened with more than patience to her narrative of all the difficulties she encountered, and the admirably skilful manner in which she had contrived to conquer them. To her husband, the manner of her communication was different. It did not accord with her notions of well-ordered domestic arrangements that the slow intellect of an elderly gentleman in the always awkward, and often invidious position of master of the family, should be made acquainted with all the minor manœuvrings by which the ark of his conjugal and paternal felicity was kept afloat.

"All that is necessary for your father to know he shall hear from me, girls," she said; "so take care not to allude before him to anything I am telling you now."

The young ladies promised discretion, and then retired to their own room to cogitate, *tête-à-tête*, on the possible advantages and probable plagues of having a girl to take about with them.

"Her being a girl of birth and fashion must certainly be an advantage, you know," observed Agatha, "and, on the whole, I suppose it is quite as well that she should not be a beauty."

"Yes, Agatha, we may thank heaven for that," replied her sister Maria; "for of all the tiresome things I can fancy, the having to take about a beauty miss, in leading strings, must be the worst! We must take care, however, to make her dress herself well, because there is something creditable in that; and as she is such a mere child, I think it will be neither more nor less than our duty to make her lay out her money profitably."

"I quite agree with you," replied Agatha. "Only fancy that brat having a hundred a-year to spend on her dress! We must never, you know, attempt the same style of things; we must keep to the graceful, becoming, fanciful line, and make her spend her money in rich solid dresses, fine furs, you know, and great broad lace; and as we are, thank heaven, beyond contradiction, a monstrous deal better-looking than she will ever be, we may trust the men for finding out that looking elegant and looking rich is not always the same thing."

"Oh yes! you are quite right," cried Maria, gaily, "I am not in the least alarmed about her hundred a-year for dress; besides, if she is not absolutely a brute, she must make us presents sometimes. What this girl ought to do is, to give us a trinket or two now and then. The merest child knows the difference between a good brooch or bracelet and a shabby one, and that is the only kind of present I should ever think of accepting."

"I quite agree with you," again said the sensible Agatha, in an accent which conveyed authority. "This, however, is all idle talk, Maria; for we know nothing on earth of this intimate new friend but that she is no beauty, and looks as solemn as an owl. And it is quite nonsense to attempt guessing whether she has any generosity of character or not. But there is a consideration, Maria, that is a great deal more to the purpose; and that is, whether we shall be able to coax mamma into making papa increase our allowance."

"Heaven knows you are right, Agatha! And I, for one, shall never know any real comfort till it is done," replied Maria, solemnly. "Thirty pounds a-year in Paris, or anywhere else where one has to go out, is a positive joke, you know."

"A joke? To be sure it is a joke; and mamma knows that as well as we do. But I by no means feel certain that she would like to make any alteration," replied Agatha; "mamma is extremely clever, we all know that, and clever people always do like to keep the management of everything in their own hands. It is too bad of mamma deceiving herself into believing that the abominable heavy bills of Mademoiselle Amabel are chiefly for us. It is no such thing; it is positively no such thing. Mamma's turbans,

with the birds and the gold lace, and then her velvet things, and all the rest of it, run away with ten times as much as our light trumpery dancing dresses."

"I have no doubt you are right, Agatha, though I have never had these horrid bills long enough in my hands to make any very close calculations," said Maria; "but I don't see how she can help it. I am sure I should not like to go out with her if she were not well dressed; and she can't wear gauzes, and nets, and trumpery muslins as we do."

"No, but then she need not talk so much more of our things than she does of her own," returned Agatha. "However, I am not going to quarrel with mamma about the bills or the dresses either. But now that such a monstrous sum of money in addition is coming with this girl, I shall be vexed if she grumble any more about what we have had from Amabel's, for I positively declare that we never have had anything that was not absolutely necessary to our making a decent appearance."

The two young ladies then proceeded to discuss the various fears, and the various hopes, to which this important addition to their family circle naturally gave rise; both agreeing that, after all, Edward was the person to whom it was likely to be the most really interesting. For that the girl would fall in love with him was as certain as that she had eyes in her head; and if he could make up his mind to marry her, it would most certainly be a very advantageous connexion for them all.

But all this, together with much more very interesting matter concerning the rather particular manner in which the young chevalier and a middle-aged count had been "going on" for some time past, must be left to the imagination of the reader, while we follow Mrs. Roberts to the presence of her husband.

"Well, my dear," began the truly worthy gentleman, with a look of considerable anxiety, but without venturing to annoy his invaluable wife by any more special questionings.

"Well, Mr. Roberts," she repeated, in an accent so charmingly equable, that it was impossible for him to judge, with any degree of certainty, whether she had succeeded or not.

"Well, my dear, have you seen the ladies?" said he, in rather a faltering voice.

"Yes, sir, to be sure I have," she replied, looking greatly surprised at the question; "what do you suppose I have been about? Did I not tell you that I was going to them? And do I ever undertake a thing without doing it? What can you ask such an idle question for?"

"Why, it is an idle question, to be sure, my dear, but the truth is, I did not like to plague you by asking for particulars just the moment you came in. But of course, my dear, I am very anxious."

"Anxious, Mr. Roberts? What is it has made you anxious,

sir? Nothing alarming has happened, I hope, since I left the house?"

"Oh dear no, nothing at all. I was thinking of what might have happened to you, my dear; I hope you have had nothing to vex you?"

"Vex me, sir, what should I have to vex me? I am not so easily vexed, Mr. Roberts, and I hope you will not be vexed either; or, at least, not unreasonably vexed, when I tell you that I found it absolutely impossible—"

Here Mr. Roberts groaned, but quite involuntarily, and he immediately endeavoured to atone for it by saying, "I beg your pardon, my dear. Don't mind me, Sarah, don't think about me—it can't be helped, and we must make the best of it."

"The best of it," she replied, in astonishment, that seemed to increase with every moment. "What *can* you mean, Mr. Roberts? I was simply going to mention to you that I found it impossible to avoid letting dear Bertha come rather early to-morrow, they were all so kindly eager and anxious that she should be with us at once. But I really never imagined that there was any very serious evil in having to hurry a little in getting a room ready for her."

"She is coming, then?" exclaimed the delighted Mr. Roberts, clasping his hands in a sort of thankful ecstasy.

"Coming, sir?" returned his wife; "didn't you know she was coming?"

"I knew, my dear, that it was your excellent plan, and most truly wise intention, to get her to come here if you possibly could. But how could I be perfectly sure in a business that required so much skill to carry through?" said Mr. Roberts.

It was now Mrs. Roberts's turn to sigh, which she did very profoundly. "I really should like to know, Mr. Roberts," she said, "how many years more you and I must continue to live together before you find out that whatever I say I will do I perform? Did I not tell you, sir, that it was my purpose to inform Lady Morton that I should not object to take charge of her niece for a few years? Did I not tell you this, Mr. Roberts?"

"Yes, you did indeed, my dear; and no doubt of it, it was nothing but my folly that made me fear about it for a single moment afterwards," replied Mr. Roberts, looking the picture of penitence. "But who is there in the whole world but you, Sarah, that could be so very certain about Lady Morton's consent the very moment you mentioned the thing to her? Who but you could have known beforehand that it *must* succeed?"

Here Mrs. Roberts smiled; a little in pity and a little in pride.

"My poor, dear, excellent Mr. Roberts," she exclaimed, "don't fancy I am angry with you; but I do believe that you are the only man alive who, being told that I had no objection to taking

Bertha Harrington, would feel any doubt about my having her. Now do just use your common sense for one moment, Mr. Roberts, and tell me how you suppose Lady Morton must have felt the moment I made her understand that I should not object to adopting her niece into my family as an inmate and friend? How do you suppose she felt, sir?"

"Why, delighted, my dear. I have no question of it, none at all," replied her husband; "she must have been delighted; and so she ought, Heaven knows, for she has now got an example to set before her niece, such as few people in this poor sinful earth of ours are often happy enough to get sight of, unless they have the good fortune to live tolerably near to you, my dear."

Mrs. Roberts now rose, and patting her husband's bald head as she passed him, said, "You are never deficient in sense, Roberts, when you give yourself a little time to think. But I must not stay gossiping with you, my dear, though you are very agreeable sometimes, when you know what you are talking about. I must positively look about the rooms, and see where I can manage to stow this poor girl. I shall make a point of being always particularly kind to her. Edward's chance, you know, will be all the better for that. If things go on between them as I expect they will, I shall begin to get very anxious to hear of old Sir Christopher's death. It will be so much pleasanter, you know, to have no doubt about their income. Five hundred a-year might do all very well for a commonplace young man, such as one generally sees, but upon my honour three thousand will not be a penny too much for him. He is so thoroughly elegant and superior."

Mrs. Roberts then left the room with a very stately step, and her husband continued looking after her as she went, as if he expected to see a train of glory left along her path.

"There never was such another woman as that!" said he, relieving his full bosom with a puffing sigh. "No, never!"

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. ROBERTS, when first made aware that she really was going to have Miss Harrington as an inmate, cast some vague thoughts towards a light closet within her daughters' bedroom, as a possible lodging-room for her during the short time that they were to remain in Paris. But the utter impossibility of putting both a bed and a washingstand in it, at one and the same time, at length decided her against it; and it then became evident, that the only feasible scheme for lodging her young guest in their apartments, would be the sending Edward to an hotel, and preparing for her the room he had occupied. But although she was exceedingly desirous of setting about it at once, she could by no means think of taking the liberty of entering her elegant Edward's

domain without announcing to him the necessity, and obtaining his permission. She therefore waited with all the patience she could muster, till he returned to the house, and then invited him to a tête-à-tête in her own room. "Oh! here you are," she exclaimed, as he entered the room, riding-whip in hand, and in the act of drawing on his snow-white riding-gloves. "Oh! my darling Edward! how I wish that you had a whole stud of Arabian horses at your command! I never, in the whole course of my life, saw a man look so perfectly elegant in a riding-dress as you do."

"I really cannot say anything about that, ma'am," replied the youth, walking up to her toilet-glass, and bending fondly over to inspect the condition of his moustache, "I must leave that to you. But now you have hooked me for a talk, mother, I will just give you a hint that you must please to make the governor shovel out a little. And indeed, a little won't do: he must come down pretty handsomely, or I shall come to a stand-still, and that won't answer for you, or the misses either, I promise you."

"It is odd enough, my dear fellow," replied his mother, gazing at him with unequivocal delight, "that you should happen to say that to me just at this moment, because what I want to say to you has got a good deal to do with it. You are not the only one of the family who is hard up, my dear Edward—for your father is pretty well drawn dry, and I have got half-a-dozen of your bills in my desk, still unpaid, besides a horrible lot of my own."

The young gentleman coloured a good deal as he listened to this, and immediately replied, "Then I must cut my stick and be off, ma'am; so you may as well give me some tin and your blessing at once; for upon my soul I can't stay here."

"I am not at all surprised to hear you say so, Edward," returned the indulgent parent; "for it is quite impossible, as I am constantly telling your father, that any man can dress as you do, and look as you do, for nothing. It is no good to expect it."

"But the old gentleman can't coin, ma'am," replied the considerate son. "You say he is done up himself, and if that notion is not got up to keep me in order, but is really truth and fact, I don't see what good I am to get by your bothering him about my dress, and the rest of it."

"You speak like an angel, my darling Edward, as you always do; but you will see, if you will listen to me, that I do not intend to sit down with my hands before me, while you are at a loss, my poor, dear boy, to find means of getting a decent coat." Her son stared, but waited in silence for what was to come next. "I do not wonder at your looking surprised, my dear," she resumed, "for it is seldom a woman *can* do anything to help her family at a pinch; but if you have patience to listen to rather a long story, I think I shall make you understand that you need not cut your stick, as you call it, you dear, droll creature, just directly."

"Fire away then, mother," said the youth, "*pauvre Jacque* must lead about my nag a little, that's all."

Mrs. Roberts then entered, somewhat more at length than it is necessary for us to follow her, into the condition of the family exchequer, and then rather abruptly asked her son, if he had ever heard his sisters mention a Miss Bertha Harrington, who was staying with his great friend and admirer, Lady Morton.

"No, not I, ma'am," returned the young man, yawning. "Oh! yes, I have though!" he added, correcting himself; "that's the girl that they said was as ugly as sin, and a great fortune."

"She is not as ugly as sin, Edward," returned Mrs. Roberts, knitting her brows; "and it is extremely wrong and foolish in your sisters to say so. I am not at all sure that she may not turn out quite as handsome as they are themselves. But that is not the point that is of the most importance to us just now."

And then she went on to explain what the reader knows already, respecting the situation and fortune of Miss Harrington; the immense advantage which the stipend she paid would be to the Roberts family in their present situation, and the very extraordinary skill with which she had managed to obtain it. Considering the thoughtless age and sprightly temperament of her son, Mrs. Roberts had every reason to be satisfied with the degree of attention with which he listened to her.

"If things are as bad as you say, mother," he replied, "you have certainly made a good hit. But it is a confounded bore, too, to have a great ugly girl in the house, by way of a boarder. Everybody will see in a moment, you know, that we are as poor as rats."

"Fear nothing on that score, dearest," replied his mother, "I shall take care to put everything on a proper footing; and, for goodness sake, don't let me hear you call her *boarder* again. It is exactly what I have been scolding your father for, Edward; and upon my word, it is more excusable in him than in you, because you ought to know so much better what's what, than we ever can expect him to do, poor dear man."

"But what the devil is she, ma'am, if she is not a boarder?" demanded Mr. Edward.

"A *WARD*, my dear boy—your father's ward—that is what she must be called. And if we all remember, on all occasions, to give her this title, everybody else will give it to her also, and the dear girl herself will be sure to adopt the idea, which will be a great advantage, because it will at once put her on a proper footing with us all."

"And will her aunt, Lady Morton, and her cousin with the big eyes, adopt the idea too, mother?" demanded the inquisitive son again.

"How like your mother you are, Edward!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, with a look of great tenderness. "You see everything

with such astonishing quickness. No, my dear ; most certainly Lady Morton would not adopt the same idea, nor her cousin, Lady Foreton, either. You are quite right ; we should get into a very disagreeable scrape, perhaps, if we hazarded anything of the kind, while we remain in Paris ; and for that reason, as well as for some others, Edward, the best thing we can do will be to move off with as little delay as possible. Now, my dear Edward, I wanted to tell you that I hope you won't mind sleeping at an hotel for the few nights we shall stay here. You won't mind it, my dear, will you ?"

"Mind it, ma'am ?—yes, to be sure I shall mind—having to pack up all my things twice over—and I, with such quantities of things upon my hands to do, and such lots of people to see. It will be a most horrid bore, ma'am, I assure you."

"I was afraid you would say so, my dearest Edward, I was indeed ; and therefore I cannot be surprised at it. But what can I do, my dear ? If we refuse to take her in at once, I am quite sure we shall lose her, and how will your bills be paid, Edward ? There is not, as you will see yourself, if you will look about, any hole or corner in which we can put her—and it would look too odd, you know, to turn your sisters out and keep you in the house, wouldn't it ? I am sure if it were not for the look of it, they should march out in double quick time, if you wished it."

"Nonsense, ma'am ; but you may tell them, if you please, that I expect they will pack up my things for me," he replied, putting on his hat before the glass, and preparing to escape ; "and don't forget to mention that they are not to read a single line—no, not a single word, remember, of any notes they find. I wish the governor's newly-invented ward was in the sea."

"Edward," said his mother, laying her hand impressively on his arm, as he passed her to go out, "Edward, I don't wish to dictate to you, I never did, and I never will ; but let me say one word to you as a friend—never suffer your sisters to judge for you respecting female beauty. Girls are never fair judges of the beauty of each other, that is one thing, my dear, that I wish you to remember ; and another is, that dear Bertha Harrington—I trust she will be dear Bertha to us all—remember, Edward, that dear Bertha Harrington is the daughter of a baronet ; and that, in all human probability, she will have an income of three thousand a-year. God bless you, my dear. Take your ride, Edward, and be sure that you shall find a comfortable room taken, and all your things carefully packed up and removed to it, by the time you return."

The Lady Morton and the Lady Foreton were as punctual as heart could wish, in escorting Miss Bertha Harrington from her apartments in the Rue Rivoli, to those occupied by the Roberts family in the Rue Têtebout. The two elder ladies, having both of

them business of considerable importance to transact at various shops, did not leave their carriage; and the young girl, wrapped in her dark mourning weeds, mounted the stairs, and entered the sitting-room of her strange hosts alone. Mr. Roberts was shut up in his own little room, reading his "Galignani," and Mrs. Roberts and her two daughters were the only occupants of the saloon. Mrs. Roberts remained tranquil for a moment, with her eye fixed on the door, to see if anyone was about to follow the young lady; but, perceiving that she was decidedly alone, she hastily rose, stepped rapidly across the floor, and, a good deal to the young lady's astonishment, enclosed her in a most affectionate embrace.

"My darling child," she exclaimed, "how delighted I am to see you! I did so wish that my poor dear girls should be thrown in the way of a young English girl of nearly their own age. I feel exceedingly flattered, my dear Bertha, and so I am sure we all do, at the friendly confidence which Lady Morton has shown in trusting you to our care; but, in fact, I never would have accepted the trust had it not been for the sake of getting a companion for my dear girls. Come here, loves," she continued, beckoning her two daughters, "come here." The young ladies obeyed, and each of them in succession received the hand of Bertha, which Mrs. Roberts, in a very sentimental manner, deposited on their palms. The sable stranger stood in the midst of them, as if she knew that it was her destiny thus to find herself she knew not where, and she knew not why. But she made a faint attempt to smile at the intimate young friends who were thus presented to her, and took a great deal of pains to prevent their seeing the tears which were gathering in her eyes. But the effort was in vain, for they made their escape, and ran trickling down her colourless cheeks, whereupon Mrs. Roberts again seized upon her, and kissed her rather vehemently upon her forehead, saying,

"This won't do, will it, girls? What can we do to put her in spirits a little? What do you say to a glass of wine, my dear?"

"Lor, mamma! of course she won't drink wine of a morning—how can you think of such a thing?" said Agatha. "Let her come with Maria and me into her room; her boxes are all there, and we will both of us help her to unpack them."

No objection being made to the proposal, the two Miss Robertses each seized upon a passive arm, and led her away. Having reached the room appropriated to her use, they entered it all together, and Maria, dropping the arm she had taken, shut to the door and bolted it. Bertha shook her head, and gently but decisively applied herself to the fastenings thus secured, and removed them. "Not now, dear young ladies, not now," she said, holding the door open, that they might pass through it; "I do not want anything out of my trunks just at present, and as my head is aching very

much, I am sure you will have the kindness to excuse my wishing to be alone."

"Oh, just as you like, Miss Bertha!" replied Agatha, laughing; "only, you know, we shall never get on if you shut yourself up in this way."

"I will be more sociable by-and-by," said Bertha, still steadily holding the door wide open in her hand.

"Come along, Agatha," said Maria, bouncing out of the room; "it is no good standing here, disputing about it."

Agatha appeared to be of the same opinion, and immediately followed her, upon which the door was very quickly, but very quietly closed; and the bolt was very quickly, but very quietly, fastened also.

"Did you hear that?" said Maria, who heard the sound, notwithstanding its being so little obtrusive. "I'll tell you what, Agatha, I don't believe a word about her being so very young—she is too quiet by half—that girl likes to have her own way, and so you'll see; and I will tell you something else too—I shall not quarrel with her for being ugly, though I think her perfectly frightful; and I shall not quarrel with her for being cross, for I shall snap my fingers at it; but I will not endure her giving herself any grand and great airs to me. Mamma may manage her as she likes, but I will not bear to be treated with pride."

"You are a fool, Maria," replied her elder sister. "She may be as proud as she likes for me, provided she does but pay enough for it."

CHAPTER XIII.

"THANK heaven, Sophy, that plague's past and over!" exclaimed Lady Morton, to her cousin, as they drove away in all the happiness of their recovered *tête-à-tête* from the Rue Têtebout. "I don't know what Sir Christopher may say to it, but let him say what he will, I would rather bear it than have that death's-head-and-crossbones for ever before my eyes."

"Indeed, my dearest cousin, I think you have decided rightly. Nature gave you a temper that was never intended for weeping and lamentation, and it would be nothing short of ingratitude and rebellion to heaven if you submitted to sit down with that girl before your eyes," replied Lady Foreton. "But I think," she added, "that you must write to her father."

"Stuff and nonsense, Sophy! I am sure I shall do no such thing. What good could I possibly do by writing? Some months hence I dare say I shall write, but shall pass over my sending her to those worthy people, quite as a matter of course—just as if I had sent her to school, you know."

Lady Foreton remained silent on hearing this, while Lady Morton put down the window of the carriage, and then put it up again half a dozen times in half as many minutes, and then she began humming a new waltz. This lasted till they had got as far as the Rue St. Honoré, and then her sweet, cheerful temper yielding at last, she exclaimed, "Be so good as to tell me what makes you sit moping there, cousin Sophy, without condescending to give me a word of answer?"

"No, no, *ma cousine*, I am not moping; I am writing to Sir Christopher Harrington."

"Are you? What a dear good creature you are, Sophy! What should I do without you? But, Sophy dear, won't he think it odd for you to write to him? He never set eyes upon you in his whole life, remember."

"Why, yes, cousin, I suspect he might think it very odd indeed. But if I wrote the letter and you copied it, he would never find it out, and I am sure it will not take you five minutes."

Lady Morton sighed, but she probably knew that resistance was vain, and said no more on the subject, suddenly dismissing it by turning the discourse to the fancy ball with which she intended to conclude the season. Her cautious cousin followed her lead, and, perfectly contented to manage the charming-tempered countess, her purse, and her parties, as completely as a pilot manages the course of a ship in fair weather, said not a syllable more either of Sir Christopher or his daughter, till she brought the following letter for her docile relative to copy:—

"DEAR SIR CHRISTOPHER,

"I hope that you will feel satisfied with what I have done about your daughter. I am sorry to say that I have found her rather behindhand in her accomplishments; everything is so advanced in Paris. But, luckily for her, a charming family of the name of Roberts, who are among my most intimate friends, and who move, indeed, in the very first circles of Paris, have two daughters, whose education is still going on, though they are already among the most finished samples of Parisian education which we have among us. In order to render perfect their accent in all the modern languages of Europe, they are about to set out upon a most delightful tour, which will comprehend Germany and Italy, and they have the excessive kindness to take Bertha with them. Had there been time I would have written to consult you on the subject; but had I done so the opportunity would have been lost, and we can never hope to find such another.

"Yours, dear Sir Christopher,

"Always affectionately,

"M. MORTON."

Having thus guarded against all possible danger of reasonable remonstrance on the part of the young lady's father, and, in a very prompt and business-like manner, settled all pecuniary matters with the Robertses, Lady Morton dismissed the disagreeable subject from her mind as completely as we now dismiss her ladyship from our pages.

As soon as this important transaction was completed, our travelling friends immediately fixed the day of their departure for Baden-Baden ; Mrs. Roberts getting rid of all her debts (excepting a few small, half-forgotten ones, for such vulgar commodities as many particularly elegant people find it impossible to remember), by means of draining their credit at their London bankers as "dry as hail," and were thus enabled to set out with light hearts, and a quarter's stipend from Miss Harrington in advance, safely stowed in Mrs. Roberts's private pocket-book. What was, however, to Mrs. Roberts's feelings more precious still than her bundle of receipts, and her not quite empty purse, was a certain tiny letter of introduction to the Dowager Grand Duchess of Baden, obtained for her by her old friend Mrs. Bretlow from a French lady of rank. This, and the comfortable conviction that, notwithstanding all her blunders about prices, and the comparative expenses of a quiet banker's life in London and those of a fine lady in Paris, she still retained in her husband's opinion the reputation of being the very best manager that ever lived, sufficed to send her off in excellent spirits. She was conscious, too, that she was exceedingly improved in a variety of ways by her residence in Paris. She knew, as she told her confidential Agatha, a monstrous deal more of life than when she set out, and that she was certain she should get on better and better every place she came to.

"It is the duty of an Englishwoman," said she, "to teach all foreigners that we are the first people of the earth in all ways ; and that is what I will teach them, go where I will, you may depend upon that, Agatha. Nobody can learn everything at the first moment, you know, and of course I felt a little put out in Paris, just at first, about that nasty, stupid milliner's bill, and one or two other things. For instance, it never struck me till quite lately that we ought to call ourselves De Roberts. I have not said a word to your father about it as yet, but I have had new card-plates engraved. You need not say anything about it either, Agatha, till after we have left Paris, because we should have such lots of questions to answer. But look here, my dear."

The young lady stretched out her hand to receive the card presented to her, and read thereon—

MADAME DE ROBERTS,
Née de Hopkins.

"What put this into your head, mamma?" said Agatha, smiling with evident admiration and pleasure.

"Why, I got hold of it, my dear, from a conversation I overheard some time ago at that ridiculous Madame de Soissonac's, who, it is quite plain, by the bye, has turned us off because Edward would not give up that pretty Madame de la Motte for her. But, however, as I was saying, it was at her house that I got the idea, which I must say I think is rather a clever one. Nothing is lost upon me, you see."

"No, mamma," replied Agatha, "you are very clever, nobody can doubt that, and I shall like to be called Mademoiselle de Roberts exceedingly; and so will Edward too, I'll engage for it, and Maria also. But I think it will puzzle papa monstrously. What do you think he will say to it?"

"I am sure I don't know, my dear; but it does not much signify, I suppose. But you must not think, Agatha, that I mean to speak disrespectfully of your father. You know I always forbid everything of the kind. Nobody shall ever have cause to say, when I am dead and gone, that I ever taught my children to speak disrespectfully of their father."

And now, everything being settled, and everything being packed, the whole family, but no longer encumbered by a servant, repaired to the Messagerie, and stowed themselves into the interior of the diligence, bound to Strasbourg. But she did not leave Paris till she had made Miss Harrington understand that the journey to Baden-Baden could not possibly be made for less than twenty pounds, which sum the melancholy girl deposited in her hands, secretly rejoicing that she was about to leave the turmoil of Paris at the distance of twenty pounds behind her.

On the whole, they might be said to have reached Strasbourg in safety; for though no part of the distance was unmarked by some very striking display of Gallic inferiority, they were neither starved to death, nor crushed into fragments by the disorderly conduct of the horses which drew their vehicle; though both the one fate and the other were pretty incessantly prophesied by the indignant Mrs. Roberts, who could neither understand how a civilized nation could submit to eat the meat that had positively been boiled in their soup, or suffer four horrid great animals to gallop abreast, when drawing a public carriage to which the safety of English travellers was so frequently intrusted!

At Strasbourg Mrs. Roberts of course thought it necessary to remain long enough to pass judgment on the merits of its cathedral; and it was there that for the first time her young *protégée*, Miss Harrington, displayed any symptom of interest in what was going on before her eyes. At the sight of the mighty church she started, and, without thinking of what she was about, she remained as perfectly still as if her feet had been rooted to the pavement, in

contemplation of the western front, long after the rest of the party had entered the building. As soon as the mournful young traveller had sufficiently recovered her presence of mind to become aware that she was alone, she experienced a painful sensation of bewilderment and fear. But although this poor girl partook of that particular weakness of mind which beset the Danish prince, and though while confessing, like him, that death was common, she might fairly enough have been exposed to the rejoinder, "Then if it be, why seems it so particular to thee?"—notwithstanding all this, Bertha Harrington was by no means a silly girl, and putting her hand before her eyes, to shut out for a moment the sight of the astounding edifice which had so overpowered her faculties, she set to work upon a strict self-examination, as to how much she remembered about the hotel at which they had taken up their quarters for the day and night. Fortunately she remembered its name, and this was enough to reassure her; for if she should happen to see no more of her party either in or about the church, she knew that she could inquire her way to the hotel. Having made up her mind on this point, a very ardent wish sprang up in her mind that she might see no more of the Robertses till she met them at dinner. The hour for this repast had, in her hearing, been named at three hours later than the present time, and the possibility that she might pass that interval not only beyond the reach of all their voices, but within the precincts of the solemn wonder that reared itself before her, caused a movement of joyous satisfaction at her heart, which it was long since she had experienced. She had no doubt, however, that she should be speedily sought for, and judiciously anticipating that the spot first revisited would be that on which she had been last seen, she glided away to the left, and was again standing entranced before the statued stateliness of the north side of the building, while her party, staring in all directions round the wide extent that spreads before the western front, remained wondering *à l'envie l'un de l'autre*, where she could possibly be. Their exit from the building in search of her, however, though by no means long delayed, was not made till the whole family had seen quite as much of the interior of Strasbourg cathedral as they desired to see. Having therefore looked about as much as they thought needful for the lost Bertha, all serious anxiety on her account being effectually prevented by their being aware that, by some strange accident or other, this very odd girl spoke French as well as she did English, they agreed to proceed on their ramble round the town. The ever-provident Mrs. Roberts, indeed, whispered to her son before they set off, that perhaps he would do better to stay behind and poke about the old church a little in search of her.

"It would be such a nice opportunity, Edward, if you did happen to find her," she added, coaxingly; "and I don't suppose

we shall see anything very particular in this queer old town."

"No, ma'am, I don't suppose there is a single thing, dead or alive, in the whole place, that I would give half a sou to look at. But I won't play guardian angel to Miss Bertha for all that. She is the dullest young devil that I ever came near in my life, and I would see her jump from the top of that filagree steeple up there rather than be plagued with her impertinent silence for five minutes."

"But, Edward dearest," persisted the anxious parent, "you should never forget that she will have three thousand a year."

"Make yourself easy, mother," replied the young man, "I never do forget it, and if her father keeps single for the next three years I fully intend to marry her, if she were to grow paler and duller every hour of her life from this day to that. But I hope, ma'am, you don't suppose that I am such a very slow-coach as to require three years to bring me in? You may manage the girl as you will for the next two years eleven months and fifteen days, and I will manage myself according to my own fancy during the same time, and then you shall see me make play, mother, push all other pretenders out of the field, and join myself in holy wedlock to the young lady and her thousands before you know where you are."

"Dear lively creature!" returned his mother, releasing the struggling arm she had seized while making the remonstrance; "if you have a mind to do that, or anything else, darling, I don't feel much doubt but that you will be able to do it. But do step on, my dear Edward, and give those two audacious officers a look with those eyes of yours. You see how they have stepped off the pavement, almost into the gutter, to let your sisters pass, as if we were such fools as not to know that they do it only to have a good opportunity of staring at them? I suppose they think we shall take it all for politeness. Not quite so soft as that, are we, Edward?"

CHAPTER XIV.

For the first time since the strange and terrible events which had sent her in a condition far worse than that of an orphan from her home and her country, Bertha Harrington now felt a sensation of positive enjoyment. Before she entered upon the stupendous vastness of the venerable church, she watched from behind a sheltering buttress the departure of the family into which she had been so strangely grafted, from the square, if the open space in which the cathedral stands supreme can be so termed, and then, released from all fears of an immediate reunion with them, she pushed open a small door and went in. On first entering the vast cathedral of Strasbourg the emotion felt is generally rather that of disappointment than pleasure; a disappointment occasioned by

the contrast between the rude and unfinished appearance of the interior, and the rich magnificence of the external architecture. The whole edifice is a noble conception; but the patience, the labour, and the abounding wealth which may so easily be traced in all the elaborate details of its exterior finishing, seem to have failed before the pious work had been long continued within. But when the pampered eye that had been feasting on the dainty decorations of the outer walls has become accustomed, as it were, to the striking difference between what it has been gazing at without, and what it has to rest upon within, the imagination very speedily becomes satisfied, and lulls itself into holy meditation in the still space, so awful in its vastness, which seems void of everything but the solemn silence that permits the thoughts to rise to heaven. Such, at least, was the influence of the place on the mind of Bertha Harrington. It was long, very long, since she had felt herself so completely at liberty, and though a well-taught young Protestant, her first impulse, in this Romish church, was to pray. Poor young creature! her heart was almost as heavy as it was innocent; and yet Bertha Harrington was not in love, nor was she poor, nor was she persecuted after the manner of a heroine, nor had she left in any other land any persons who were much dearer to her than those she had found in this. For, in truth, she had never loved, warmly, truly, and devotedly, but one human being, and that one was her mother. This mother, as unlike in all things to the sister who has been introduced to the reader as it was possible for one woman to be to another, had passed through a short life to an awfully sudden death, with little to cheer her seemingly prosperous, but really unhappy, destiny, save the constant society, the constant love, and the constant duty of her one sweet child.

Lady Harrington, who was fifteen years younger than her sister, had been early married to her wealthy, handsome, and very accomplished husband. She had loved him, too, most tenderly; and as she was blessed with great beauty, very bright intelligence, perfect health, great acquirements in all accomplishments that could fascinate others and amuse herself, and, to crown all, possessed a most sweet and loving temper, it is not surprising that she was looked upon as one of the happiest young women in existence. It is, however, to be hoped that there are but few so wretched. Her first misfortune was the giving birth to a daughter instead of a son. The sort of effect which this disappointment produced on the father is not easily described. His beautiful young wife seemed suddenly to become disagreeable to him. He did not positively use her ill, that is to say, he never addressed her in harsh or unseemly language, nor were any of the luxuries of her station and fortune withdrawn; but, in truth, he rarely addressed her at all; and having arranged her removal from London, where her child was born, to his remote castle in Ireland, he never arranged any other

removal for her, but without alluding to any cause whatever for his conduct, he gradually withdrew himself from her society, passing the greater part of his time in London, but still occasionally paying a visit of a few days at a time to his castle, his wife, and his child, so that he could not strictly be said to live separately from her. But it would have been greatly more for her happiness had he done so; for then time, her little daughter, her books, her music, and the lovely wildness of her magnificent abode, would by degrees have soothed her spirit, and reconciled her to her strange destiny. But these visitations perpetually disturbed her existence, without cheering it, and it was only during the last two or three years of her life, when Bertha had become capable of being her companion as well as her pupil, that the spirit of the neglected wife, and almost desolate recluse, became tolerably tranquil, and resigned to the lot she had drawn. During these years, Bertha had grown into so very charming and so very dear a companion, that her mother could endure with comparative indifference the seemingly unmeaning comings and goings of Sir Christopher. The only care which the negligent father of this sweet girl ever bestowed on her education was the sending down a young Frenchwoman to Castle Harrington by way of a governess. Bertha was, however, rather more than twelve years old when she arrived, and as her mother had already made her an extremely good French scholar, this innovation might very well have been dispensed with. However, as the young woman was a Parisian, and appeared to have been well educated, Lady Harrington willingly submitted to it, permitting the handsome stranger to live *en tiers* with herself and her daughter, save for two precious hours in the evening, when, previous to their retiring together to rest, the mother and daughter still enjoyed an interval of unbounded confidence. And in the mornings, too, when rambling further on foot than the delicate Mademoiselle Labarre liked to follow them, they still pursued their sketching, or their botanizing tête-à-tête; but during the rest of the day they lived all together, and Bertha had the advantage of improving her French accent, and her familiarity with the colloquial idiom; for the conversation was wholly French, Mademoiselle professing herself entirely ignorant of the English language.

In this manner above four years had passed with little variety, save that which arose from the visits of Sir Christopher. These seldom lasted beyond a day or two, but they had become considerably more frequent than formerly; they caused, however, but little variety in the daily routine of Lady Harrington's life, or in that of her daughter either. Their morning walks and their evening in tête-à-tête, went on as usual, for Sir Christopher invariably passed his evenings in his library. Mademoiselle Labarre also continued her usual practice of respectfully saluting the ladies as

soon as she had taken her coffee, and leaving the saloon to Lady Harrington and her daughter.

Although Mademoiselle Labarre was, as we have said, no great walker, her general health had appeared exceedingly good till within a few weeks of the sudden death of Lady Harrington. She then appeared to lose her spirits and her strength, and soon took the opportunity of Sir Christopher's arrival at the castle to signify her intention of resigning her situation and returning to the continent. No time, however, was specified for her departure, but it was understood that she intended to set off as soon as she felt well enough to undertake the journey. Great kindness and attention was shown her on the part of Lady Harrington, but she made no effort to detain her, as it appeared evident, from Sir Christopher's silence on the subject, that he agreed with her in thinking that Bertha could not reap any further benefit from her services.

Things were in this state, and Sir Christopher himself still at the castle, when one night, shortly after the mother and daughter had retired to bed, Bertha, who slept in a bed beside her mother's, was suddenly awakened by a cry from Lady Harrington. The young girl was by her side in an instant, and the light of the night-lamp sufficed to show her the beloved features of her mother convulsed in mortal agony. To procure assistance was of course the first idea that occurred to her, and hastily stretching out her hand to seize the lamp, while her eyes were still fixed on the convulsed features of her mother, she overturned it, and the flame went out. She knew her way, however, to the chamber of her mother's personal attendant too well to cause her any fear lest she should fail to find it without a light, and losing not an instant even to clothe her delicate feet in slippers, she crept along by the help of the well-known furniture till she reached the door, and entered upon the long passage which led to the rather distant sleeping-rooms of the household. She moved so noiselessly along the carpeted passage, that if every room she passed had been inhabited, it would have been impossible that any one could have heard her. Nevertheless she perceived a strong light gleam from the partially opened door of one of the rooms she was about to pass, and rejoiced by the hope of finding speedy aid, she quickened her already rapid pace for a step or two, and presently perceived that the light came from the door of Mademoiselle Labarre.

There had ever been something, it would be difficult to say what, in the manners of this young woman, which, though perfectly well-bred and respectful, had never led to that kindly degree of intimacy which Lady Harrington would willingly have permitted; there had ever been something of restraint and coldness throughout the whole of their intercourse, which would certainly have prevented Bertha from selecting her as the first to summon in a moment of such painful alarm as the present; nevertheless, she

determined, as her door was open, to enter her room, and entreat her to awaken some of the men servants, and send them off for medical assistance. But one or two more of her rapid, noiseless steps, brought her within reach of seeing the figure of the Frenchwoman, who stood immediately within the door, and also her features, made distinctly visible by the light of a wax-taper she held in her hand. The figure of Bertha was still completely hid in the obscurity of the passage, and for an instant she paused to contemplate the spectre-like countenance of Mademoiselle Labarre. She was as pale as death ; her eyes were not only wide open, but distended so much beyond their usual size, as to give her the appearance of being under the influence of terror, that amounted to agony. Her lips were unclosed and frightfully colourless, and her beautiful teeth were visible from side to side, in a manner that seemed to express the suspension of all her faculties in a paroxysm of horror. At any other moment Bertha would have fled from her in alarm, in the belief probably that some sudden fit of frenzy had fallen upon her ; but now, bewildered herself, the poor girl, by the dreadful fears to which her mother's violent sufferings had given rise, fancied that Mademoiselle Labarre had been made aware of them, she knew not how, and feeling that her ghostly appearance was only a part of the frightful terror of the moment, she rushed onward, and seized her by the arm.

The governess uttered a shriek so loud and shrill that Bertha recoiled from her in terror, but she called her by her name, adding, "Gracious Heaven ! she has lost her senses !" These sounds seemed to restore the bewildered faculties of Mademoiselle Labarre, and she exclaimed, in French, "I beg your pardon. Is it you ? Why—" "Oh ! mademoiselle," exclaimed Bertha, "my mother !"

"Your mother ? Is she dead ?" said the governess, shuddering. "Oh ! Heaven forbid !" cried Bertha, "but she is ill, mademoiselle, very ill ; I am going for her maid. Give me your candle ; we are in darkness. Light this other candle, Mademoiselle Labarre, and in the name of pity rouse some of the servants that they may go for the apothecary."

Having obtained the light, Bertha darted forward, and presently aroused the sleeping maid, who instantly accompanied her back to the chamber of her mistress. As they passed the door of Mademoiselle Labarre, they perceived that it was wide open, and the apartment empty. "She is gone to call the men-servants," said Bertha. "No matter where she is gone," replied the waiting-maid, between her closed teeth. Bertha turned quickly round to look at her, but this was no moment to ask for explanations. They were already at the door of Lady Harrington's room, and, hastening through it, they found her lying perfectly still, but already as pale as a corpse, and very nearly as motionless. Bertha bent over her in unspeakable agony, and wiped the cold dew from her forehead.

"Sir Christopher ought to be called, Miss Bertha," said the sobbing maid. "Go," replied Bertha, "go to him."

The woman left the room without reply, and then the wretched girl, who already felt that she was motherless, pressed her trembling lips to those of the idolized parent who she knew too surely would soon be removed from her for ever. The cold hand which she had taken in hers, feebly returned the pressure of her fingers, and then, as Bertha stooped again to kiss that dear and still living hand, the lips of her dying mother parted, and a voice that sounded as if it issued from the tomb, pronounced the word "POISON." There could be no mistake. The voice was low, hollow, and sepulchral, but the word was perfectly distinct.

The agony which but one short moment before seemed beyond the power of fate to render more bitter, was now increased tenfold.

Bertha uttered a shriek almost as terrible as that which she had listened to from her governess a few moments before, and then a wild idea that help might even yet be administered took possession of her, and, utterly distracted, she rushed out of the room, exclaiming, "Murder! Poison! Help!"

At no great distance from the door she met her father; his dressing-gown was hurriedly thrown round him, and he looked pale and frightened.

"She is poisoned! she is poisoned!" shrieked Bertha. Sir Christopher spoke not, but hurried onward to his lady's room.

"Give orders, Miss Bertha,—give orders instantly, that the guilty wretch escape not!" cried the personal attendant of Lady Harrington, in a state of dreadful excitement. "I found her with him, Miss Bertha! I found her in the bedroom of your father. Let her not escape. If you are my angel lady's daughter, let her not escape. She has murdered her—your mother!"

Several servants, both male and female, were by this time collected in the corridor, and all of them rushed forward together towards the room of Lady Harrington. Bertha, when the dreadful words of her mother's maid reached her ear, attempted to speak, but her voice failed her and she fell fainting upon the ground.

When she recovered her senses, she found herself in a room distant from that which had for years been shared between her and her mother, and with the usual medical attendant of the family hanging over her. For a few moments she was utterly bewildered, and all her efforts were insufficient to recall clearly the scenes which had preceded the loss of her senses. By degrees, however, these dreadful scenes returned with only too much precision and certainty, and raising her head from the pillow, she exclaimed, "My mother!" No voice answered her. The apothecary stepped aside, and taking a glass of hartshorn and water from the table, put it silently to her lips.

"It is over! She is dead!" said the poor girl, putting aside the

needless remedy which was to restore sensation, already too acutely alive.

"It is too true, my dear young lady," replied the apothecary. "Pray to God that you may be supported under this most terrible affliction."

Bertha fixed her eyes upon him, and was evidently struggling with her own weakness to ask some question, the nature of which might be read in her eyes, though her lips refused to utter it. At that moment there was no doubt that she was in perfect possession of her senses, but no one had the heart to tell her that there was every reason to believe her mother was murdered; no one had courage to say that some of the servants, who had long suspected a too great intimacy between Mademoiselle Labarre and their master, had now spoken openly; and that the wretched woman, having been sought for in vain in every part of the castle and grounds, was considered as the author of Lady Harrington's death. No one dared to tell her that her father, having looked for a moment on the breathless body of his wife, had shut himself up in his own apartment; and when applied to for instructions as to how the terrified household were to proceed, uttered only the words, "Begone! Leave me! Do what you will!"

None of this was spoken openly to Bertha; she would have suffered less in health, probably, if it had been; but having heard and understood enough to make her either know or suspect almost everything, she was left to supply what was imperfect in the horrible history, by the working of her already shaken reason; and the consequence was, that within twelve hours of the mother's death, the daughter was in a state of violent delirium.

Sir Christopher, meanwhile, must have so far recovered his composure as to have issued the orders which the nature of the circumstances rendered absolutely necessary for his own security. He volunteered a deposition before the nearest magistrate, in which he confessed the disgraceful fact that the governess of his daughter was his mistress; and plainly stated his belief that this woman, moved by a paroxysm of jealousy, had caused the death of Lady Harrington by poison. He had lost no time in summoning the proper persons to examine the body, which had exhibited the most unequivocal proofs of the cause of her death; and he had caused every repository which had been used by the suspected fugitive to be sealed, till formally examined before proper legal authorities. Not only these, but all the minor details called for by the occasion, were punctually attended to. The state of his young daughter, not being considered dangerous, but merely the temporary consequence of the violent agitation she had endured, did not prevent Sir Christopher's giving orders for the preparation of suitable mourning for her; and as soon as it was deemed proper for her to travel, she had been sent to her estimable aunt in Paris.

But none of all this important business had occupied the baronet

so completely as to prevent his organizing a series of mystifications for the public papers, which, by the help of a skilful agent, had succeeded beyond his hopes. The first step in this series was to despatch an account of his lady's sudden death to a multitude of journals, in which every fact, except that of her death, was falsified; and as these differed from each other in all essential points, the truth, which was never stated in any of them, was merged and lost sight of, amidst the mass of wild romances which were immediately put into circulation. In one account it was stated that the unhappy lady had been barbarously murdered by a party of discontented tenants, who had been suddenly dismissed from their farms. This was contradicted on the following day, by a declaration, "by the highest authority," that the district, though one of the most disorderly in Ireland, had been particularly quiet for some time; and that it was the life of Sir Christopher, and not that of his lady, which had been endangered by the practices of some evil-disposed individuals who had contrived to get domesticated in the family. This again was quickly followed by a grave statement, that the whole of the reports respecting the peculiar circumstances which had been supposed to attend the death of the late lamented Lady Harrington, were utterly unfounded, and had arisen solely from her having died so suddenly as to induce her agitated husband to insist upon a *post-mortem* examination; and in this last statement there was, apparently, such a weight of grave authority as to make it speedily settle itself into the public mind as the truth. Of private accounts there were none whatever. The castle and its dependencies formed one of the most desolate, though most picturesque domains in Ireland; and such was the state of the population round it, that no single proprietor, except Sir Christopher, made a residence of any mansion to be found for many miles round Castle Harrington. And thus an event which, under other circumstances, might have made a nine days' wonder for the gaping world, passed like the unsubstantial vision of a magic lantern, too rapid in movement and too vague in outline to leave much trace on the memory of any save the scattered few whose destinies were affected by it. This rapid sketch may account for the melancholy of the "horrid girl," whose sadness had so painfully annoyed the sweet temper of Lady Morton.

CHAPTER XV.

AND now to return to time present. There stood Bertha beneath the towering roof of Strasbourg cathedral, her sorrows, as well as herself, seeming for the moment to be lost in its stupefying vastness, and a feeling of pious submission to the Being for whose worship it was reared, so soothingly stealing over her, that, for the first time since her misfortune, she forgot to think herself the most unhappy being in existence. The holy stillness of the

place was most delicious to her, and as she paced with noiseless tread from one extremity of the solemn edifice to the other, she thanked God that her reason had not forsaken her for ever, and that her spirit could still taste the elevating influence of such a moment as she now enjoyed.

Though the Roberts family had wandered away to the gardens which skirt the town, without the clog of any great anxiety on the subject of Bertha's disappearance, she was not forgotten by them during the domestic enjoyment of their ramble; and, to say truth, there was not one of the family, the heavy Mr. Roberts himself included, who did not relieve their minds by abusing her, more or less. The young gentleman, though he confessed that he had decided upon making her his wife, notwithstanding declared that she was, beyond all comparison, the most confounded little *rococo* bore he had ever encountered, and that he did not believe she had ever once looked him in the face from the first moment she had entered their house at Paris to the instant she had contrived to dodge away from them at the cathedral.

"My dear Edward, the girl is a fool," observed his mother in reply. "I have watched her closely; my eyes were not given me for nothing, and I will venture to assert that her intellect is below the ordinary level. This is certainly a great misfortune, and I am very sorry for it. But we can't in this life, you know, Edward, expect to find everything cut-and-dried exactly according to our wishes. I do *not* think she is ugly, and there is some comfort in that, you must allow."

"You are not going to fancy, I hope, that I have any intention of falling in love with her, ma'am?" said Mr. Edward, with a broad grin. "I must beg that you will make up your mind to be contented with my marrying her."

"You dear, droll creature, you! Who ever asked you to fall in love with her?" returned his lively mother, with a gay laugh. "I am afraid we all know you too well, you gallant gay Lothario, for us to entertain any such expectation. But my conscience gives me no trouble on that head, Mr. Edward Roberts. Your angelic temper will be sure to make any woman you marry happy, whether you love her or not."

This did not reach the still rather old-fashioned ear of Mr. Roberts, nor was it intended to do so. But he caught enough of the conversation to know that the subject of it was his ward, as he was already beginning pretty constantly to call her, and he ventured to join in it so far as to say, "I see you are talking of my ward, my dear, and I'll bet sixpence that there is not one of ye who can find anything very favourable to say of her. No wonder, no wonder; I am not going to quarrel with you for that, for I do think she is the very dullest young girl that I ever made acquaintance with in the whole course of my life."

"Then what do you think she must appear to us, sir?" demanded Agatha sharply. "Nobody seems to consider what Maria and I must suffer, such lively creatures as we both are, from being perpetually obliged to associate with such a girl as Bertha Harrington. I know that mamma thinks she will turn out a perfect treasure by way of a contrast, but it is not paying us a very flattering compliment to fancy we want such a one."

"You may talk of her folly, her stupidity, her melancholy, or her bad temper, as much as you like," said Maria, with a good deal of bitterness, "but I tell you it is all pride; hateful, detestable, abominable pride; and if Edward does make up his mind to marry her (which I trust he won't do if he can get anything better), I shall take care to make her understand that she is not to play the great lady to me—I won't bear it."

Having reached the *café*, to which the military who guard the venerable town, and the fair ladies who adorn it, are wont to resort, to eat ices, sip cherry water, and to look at each other, the English party seated themselves upon a bench, and Mr. Edward inquired what they intended to take. "Take, Edward?" replied his economizing mother, "why, good gracious, my dear, we are just going to dinner." "And who ever heard that ice spoilt the appetite, ma'am?" rejoined the youth. "It never spoils mine at any rate, and I shall take some, if nobody else does." Mrs. Roberts gave an intelligent look to her daughters, between whom and herself there was an understanding that they were to spare every possible expense on the journey, for the purpose of saving money to buy a new bonnet all around, the very first time they saw "anything decent" in that line; for the getting clear of Paris had not been achieved without considerable difficulty, and all intended farewell purchases there had been perforce abandoned.

Mr. Edward therefore walked off alone, and the young ladies beguiled the period of his absence by listening with much dutiful attention to the ingenious theories by which their mamma kindly endeavoured to reconcile them to remaining behind.

"It is all very natural for Edward, you know, to think more of the pleasure of eating an ice than of the value of the sous he pays for it; for it is impossible that it *can* make so much difference to him as it may to you. But I would just have you ask yourselves, girls, whenever you bring your minds to consent to any little economy of the kind—I would just have you ask yourselves which is likely to answer best—eating ices and cakes, or spending the money in something that shall improve your appearance? Ask yourselves if eating ices ever got any girl a husband? Only ask yourselves that question, and I don't think you will ever care much about eating ices again." Both the girls having agreed that she was perfectly right, and that they would rather have a new bonnet than all the ices in the world, they sat waiting very patiently for the return of their brother, only thinking, in the way of regret,

how very much better off the men were, who had the power of getting a rich wife, as Edward was going to do, than the women, who had nothing for it but to wait, and look beautiful, till they were invited to change their condition.

They were in some degree rewarded for their good behaviour, by perceiving that the group of which they made part had attracted the attention of a very gay-looking party of officers who were lounging about the door of the *café*, and reasonably thinking that neither their papa nor their mamma were at all likely to draw upon themselves so lengthened an examination, they fairly concluded that the gentlemen were looking at them. They might, perhaps, have been better pleased still, had they known the sort of observations to which their position at the present moment and that of their brother had given rise. They must have been pleased, for they had doubtless heard that

“Pity melts the soul to love;”

and these military gentlemen were, one and all of them, expressing a great deal of pity for the pretty girls sitting so forlornly on the bench, while “that odious-looking young puppy” was cramming ices by himself.

These observing gentlemen had permitted their eyes to reconnoitre “la famille Anglaise” with a good deal of attention, for they possessed one great and decided attraction for officers in garrison—they were new. On perceiving the young man of the party enter the *café*, and hearing him demand in the usual English accent of authority, “*Avez-vous des glaces?*” they took it for granted that he was about to convey this pleasant refreshment to the ladies, and, as the Miss Robertses were really pretty girls, they would gladly have assisted him in performing this service, had waiters been wanting. But when they saw him seat himself under the shade of the awning, while a waiter brought him ice after ice, till he had devoured three; when they saw this, and moreover perceived, by the frequent turning of the ladies’ heads towards him, that they were waiting for him, and perhaps rather impatiently, one of them said to the rest, with a most expressive shrug, “How much do you think a French girl of eighteen would take to change places with either of those unhappy ones?”

Alas! poor England! It is thus thou art perpetually judged by our short-sighted neighbours. Yet how can we blame them? What avails it that our countrywomen would be quite as unwilling to change places as the fairest French receiver of *petits soins* could possibly be? They know nothing about it. How should they?

On returning to their hotel, the Roberts family found that their sagacity had led them to judge rightly, for that Miss Harrington had returned before them. They were not surprised at this, but they were surprised at the strikingly altered aspect of the young

lady. Bertha Harrington did not greet them, as heretofore, with downcast eyes, and silence as nearly perfect as it could be consistent with civility. No, she looked up at them, and spoke to each of them, with a kind and gentle smile. The hour she had passed in the solemn solitude of Strasbourg cathedral had been turned to good account. She had prayed for resignation, and the humble prayer was not unheard. Their dinner was taken at the *table-d'hôte*, where the guests were for the most part military. One of these gentlemen sat beside the elder Miss Roberts, and politely did the honours of the wine and the dishes near him. "Qu'il est bête !" said the young lady to her sister, who sat on the other side of her. And the phrase was uttered very audibly, because it enabled her at once to display her knowledge of the French language, and her indignation at being spoken to without an introduction.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE spending either time or money in hunting for the treasures which nature or art might chance to have bestowed on the various places through which their travels led her, did not enter into the scheme of Mrs. Roberts's economy ; unless, indeed, the said treasures had become so notoriously objects of fashionable curiosity as to render the paying some attention to them both a matter of necessity and a matter of course. The cathedral of Strasbourg was one of these, because Mrs. Roberts had so often heard about the spires being so very high, and so very much like lace-work, and because, moreover, Agatha had written a memorandum in her pocket-book, to assist her in remembering that it was in the cathedral of Strasbourg that the Earl of Oxford and Queen Margaret, according to the unimpeachable Northern chronicle, had their famous interview. In respect to the lace-work, Mrs. Roberts honestly confessed that she was a good deal disappointed. What it was she had expected in that line, she did not explain, but it certainly was not what she saw. However, she confessed also that the spire *was* uncommonly high ; and Agatha protested that she was perfectly sure she had found the door at which the queen made her mysterious exit ; so, on the whole, the family declared themselves greatly pleased, and set off for Baden-Baden the next morning, with the pleasantest conviction that they had made the most of their time, and done and seen a great deal more than most people.

Bertha Harrington, indeed, had a silent thought or two concerning the chances there might be against her ever finding herself within the venerable city again, and perhaps *guessed* that there might be something more there which she, in her youthful, humble-minded state of existence, would have deemed worth looking at. But she did not think the looking at them worth the tremendous experiment of asking Mrs. Roberts to remain there for another day.

Her meditations in the church had done her good, nor was she at all likely to abandon the resolution she had there taken of rousing herself from the state of almost torpid despair into which she was conscious she had fallen since the terrible death of her mother. But although this was likely to produce very considerable effect upon her general conduct, it did not inspire sufficient courage to induce her to enter into discussion with Mrs. Roberts. And so the Roberts family moved on, though it is certain that, at this stage of their travels, a single word from the heiress would have sufficed to have made them halt, retreat, turn eyes right, or eyes left, or march forward, at her pleasure. Perhaps it was a pity she did not know this, as it might have enabled her to see many things which were now left unseen ; and as "use lessens marvel," it was possible that, as time wore on, they might lose their sense of her greatness, and feel less disposed to prefer her will to their own.

The purpose of the effective leader of the party, however, was in this case, as in most others, in very happy conformity with the inclinations of her family. Her son and her daughters sighed for ball-rooms and public walks, and the estimable father of the race was still so freshly under the influence of the admiration inspired by his adorable wife's last display of good management, in carrying off with her from Paris an extra purse of such considerable value, while rather adding to than derogating from the family dignity by the achievement, that the mere circumstance of her making a proposal to do this, that, or the other, was a positive pleasure to him, and he listened with a broad, bland smile upon his countenance, and as broad and bland a conviction at his heart, that something good and profitable must come of it. So on they went, and found themselves and their well-packed vetturino carriage driving along the picturesque defile blessed by the tepid springs of Baden-Baden, just at the hour when its cosmopolite population begin to display their many-coloured wings, in order to see and be seen for the next twelve hours under all the various aspects that pleasure can devise.

The spectacle was at once horrific and enchanting. "Gracious heaven! what a beautiful group of women!" exclaimed Edward Roberts, twisting himself round in his seat in the open *coupée* of the vehicle, both for the purpose of addressing his sisters within the carriage, and lengthening his gaze at the party. "I wonder what country they are? but what a confounded bore it is to be seen for the first time boxed up in this beastly tub! Just look at my father's hat!"

"Don't talk of his hat, Edward! Look at Maria's! Look at us all—covered with dust, and as tightly wedged in, with all our boxes and trunks piled up behind us, as if we were a company of strolling players!" said Agatha. Maria groaned. "Was there ever anything so provoking?" resumed her not less sensitive but

more expansive sister. "What a set of men those ladies on horse-back have got with them! It is really too provoking." "It is a d—d shame to travel in such a way as this," said Edward, muffling his face in his pocket-handkerchief. "You are a fool for what you say, my dear, but you are wise in what you do," said Mrs. Roberts, following his example, and as nearly as possible covering her ample face also with her pocket-handkerchief. The vetturino crept on, and for about two minutes the agitated family had the comfort of enjoying the road, with nothing but the dust to annoy them. Mrs. Roberts put the interval to profit by pronouncing the following oration:—

"You are very great fools, all of you. And so you always will be, you may depend upon it, whenever you choose to fancy yourselves wiser than your mother. If you were a few years older, Edward, you would know that it was a thousand times less dangerous to come into a new place as we are doing now, which is exactly in the right way to prevent any one from caring a straw about us, than if we were to appear in a dirty, dusty, shabby-looking carriage, with four bony post-horses, with no outrider, no courier, no servants. Everybody always does look up, and begin peering and peeping, when they hear and see post-horses, but nobody ever thinks of giving a second glance, or a first either, at a vetturino. And you may just ask yourselves if it is likely you should either of you be known again when you come forth, dressing as you did at Paris, for the same shabby set that looks so cross and so dusty now?"

To this point the voice of authority had been listened to with apparent resignation; but exactly as Mrs. Roberts pronounced the word "now," a handsome open carriage, with two elegant-looking women in it, and an exquisitely caparisoned gentleman on either side, was seen advancing towards them. The agony of the trio of young Robertses was then at its climax. The son uttered a very unseemly word indeed. It was now Agatha's turn to groan, which she did, as she buried her face in her hands; while poor Maria muttered "Diable!" with an accent perfectly French, but a pang at her heart which, under the circumstances, was perfectly English. She retained sufficient self-possession, however, to follow the example of her brother, and to envelope her face very completely in her handkerchief. But the superiority of the mother's genius displayed itself at this trying moment most strikingly. She rose from her seat in the back of the carriage, and, throwing herself forward, seized the head of her husband in both her hands, and, twisting it suddenly round towards the hedge, exclaimed, "Look there!"

Of course Mr. Roberts did look there, most effectually concealing his large comely face thereby, and Mrs. Roberts was rewarded for her presence of mind and admirable *aplomb*, by seeing the

dreaded carriage roll by, and feeling certain that though the bright eyes it conveyed were very deliberately directed towards her and her family, there was not so much as the tip of a nose left visible by which they might any of them be known again under the widely different circumstances in which they intended hereafter to appear.

But, alas! at the instant that she ventured to replace her person in its seat of honour, and permitted herself, from beneath her sheltering veil, to take a glance both at her own party and that which had passed by them, she perceived that the eyes of Bertha Harrington, caught by the picturesque ruins of the Alt Schloss, were not only wide open, and unshaded by any contrivance whatever, but thrown up in eager admiration of the scene on which they had fixed themselves, and looking at that unfortunate moment so infinitely more bright and beautiful than she had ever seen them before, that she exclaimed, in a burst of uncontrollable passion, "Hang the girl, she does it on purpose!"

Maria's conscience told her that this burst of indignation was produced by her own too spirited appeal to the Prince of Darkness, while Agatha bitterly reproached herself, in the belief that the attitude into which she had thrown herself was too likely to attract attention, and both felt very dutifully penitent. Their emotions would probably have been altogether of a different character had they been aware that their young companion, had, at that most unlucky moment, both attracted and fixed by far the most fashionable pair of eyes of which Baden-Baden could boast that season, and that, too, with an ecstasy of admiration which left not the hundredth part of a glance for any one else; a fact which would have been rendered more provoking still, could they have also been made aware that the earnestness of that glance had very satisfactorily ascertained the fact that the most captivating face in the world was making its *entrée* into Baden in a dusty, overloaded sort of a caravan! But ignorance is indeed very often bliss, and most assuredly was so on the present occasion; and flattering themselves that it was quite impossible they should ever be recognized as the dusty travellers whose faces had been so carefully concealed, they scrambled out of the carriage, and dived into the shelter of the hotel to which they were driven, with a lightness of step that spoke well for the state of their spirits.

Mrs. Roberts herself enjoyed the release from her travelling equipage, fully as much as her daughters could do, but there was more of sobriety and thoughtfulness in her movements. She looked about her, and became immediately aware that the draperies of the window curtains were a great deal too elegant to permit any hope of reasonable charges at the hotel, and therefore that it would be absolutely necessary for her to find private lodgings before night. All she had yet seen of the place convinced her that it was

exceedingly gay and elegant, and thereupon she naturally determined that she and her family should be exceedingly gay and elegant too, a sort of resolution which never came to her mind unaccompanied with another, for the moment at least, equally strong, that she would be most strenuously economical.

"We must not stay here a moment longer than we can help, my dear," said she, addressing her husband. "Not a bed to be had under three francs, I'll answer for it. Dinner we must have, if it is only to get house-room for an hour or two, and I shall order it directly, and then set off with you and Agatha, to look for lodgings."

"With me, mamma!" exclaimed Agatha, with every appearance of disinclination to the proposal. "You don't suppose that I intend to show myself in such a place as this, dressed as I am now? I neither can nor will do it, and that's flat."

"You know, Agatha, that you speak better French than any of us," replied her mother, coaxingly, "and, depend upon it, my dear, that it will be greatly for your comfort and advantage to go with me. Girls have always such a quick eye for closets and wardrobes, and all that; besides, the fact is, that I won't go without you. I never can speak French in my best manner when I am as hot and tired as I am now, and unless you mean to go back to Strasbourg, or some of the little villages near it, to pass the summer, you *must* come with me; so don't make any more difficulties about it, there's a dear girl."

"If I do go, then, it shall be without papa," returned the young lady, "for change of dress, you know very well, never can make such a difference in him as to prevent his being known again. The best way, if I must go, will be for Bertha to lend me her crape bonnet and mantle, and with this old black gown everybody will fancy, of course, that I am somebody in mourning, and then I certainly shall have a tolerable chance of not being known again, for I shall first come out visible in my *préjugé vaincu* bonnet and scarf. And as for you, mamma, I will positively not stir a step unless you will let me take every atom of riband out of your bonnet, and that flower out of your cap, and you shall have Maria's thick green veil and your own horrid old travelling shawl, and then I think we may venture. But, remember, never as long as you stay here shall you ever put on that striped gown again."

All these conditions being complied with, the dinner was ordered, and while it was preparing the masquerading apparel of the two ladies was prepared also, and having performed their parts at the repast, they set off immediately on its conclusion, looking, as Maria assured them, so very queer and unlike themselves, that she did not conceive there could be any danger of their ever being recognized afterwards.

CHAPTER XVII.

HAD the landscape-loving Bertha Harrington been of the party, it is likely enough that the lodging-seeking might have proceeded but slowly; for it is difficult to take a single step at Baden-Baden, without coming in sight of tempting paths, which so evidently lead to what is beautiful, that it is difficult to turn away from them. Fortunately for the family convenience, Mrs. Roberts and her daughter Agatha were free from all such wandering weakness. Mountains and forests were to them no more attractive than Salisbury Plain would have been under similar circumstances, and the murmuring Oelbach on one side, and the massive walls that enclose and conceal the chambers of the secret tribunal on the other, stole not a single glance from the square little painted boards which here and there volunteered the agreeable intelligence that "*appartements garnis*" were still to be had. Not one of these welcome notices was neglected; even where the outward appearance of the accommodation offered was such as to produce from the young lady a very eager exclamation, such as, "For Heaven's sake do not go in there, mamma!" or, "How can you suppose, ma'am, that we can all be packed into such a hole as this?" the indefatigable Mrs. Roberts replied, "It is impossible to judge, Agatha, till we have seen everything." In many cases, the little square boards led them to the examination of little square rooms, too miserably small to afford any hope to the heated and weary Mrs. Roberts that her party might be coaxed into enduring them. The heart and soul of this excellent parent and admirable manager were about equally divided between vanity and economy; though sometimes the one, and sometimes the other, seemed to have the preponderance, which, of course, depended upon the particular circumstances in which she found herself placed; but when she set out upon this tour in search of lodgings, economy was decidedly in the ascendant. Accordingly, she repeatedly endeavoured, or appeared to endeavour, to prove that many of the little lodgings they now went over would be good enough, quite good enough, if they could but contrive to have an additional bed or two added to the accommodation they offered.

"How can you say so, mamma?" exclaimed the vexed Agatha, upon one occasion, when the apartment under examination was not only exceedingly small, but situated at the extremity of a long dark passage, which gave anything but a distinguished air to the approach. "How can you talk of bringing Miss Harrington into such a place as this? You know she can be obstinate when she takes it into her head. I would advise you to remember the resolute stand she made against our either of us sleeping in the same room with her. It would be very short-sighted economy if you were to disgust her just at the beginning in this manner. I

think from what I know of her that she is quite capable of writing to her relations to tell them that she is so extremely uncomfortable that she cannot bear it."

"And *I* think, my dear, from what I know of her relations, that if she did she would get nothing for her pains but a good scolding," replied her mother.

"Very likely, ma'am," returned the acute Agatha, "if she were such a fool as to write to that impertinent old lady in Paris. But that is *not* what she would do, you may depend upon it. She would write to her father, ma'am, and such an application as that might answer better, perhaps."

"Good gracious, child! what could have put such a very disagreeable idea into your head?" returned Mrs. Roberts. "I would not have such a thing happen for a hundred pounds, or more too, perhaps. Suppose we go back, Agatha, to that pretty house that looked out upon a garden? It was most abominably dear, certainly, but it might, after all, be better economy to give a high rent just for one or two of the summer months, than run the risk of losing this girl. Don't you think that house would do very well, my dear?"

"No, mamma, I do not," replied Agatha, feeling her courage strengthened by her easy victory. "Though the fine folks we met as we came into town did not see much of us, I should think that you must have seen enough of them to be very sure that, let us dress and look as well as we may, they would see us all at the bottom of the sea before they would come to call upon us in such a little bit of a cottage as that. I suppose you have forgotten, mamma, that you have brought a letter to the dowager grand-duchess! Just fancy any of her people bringing an invitation to such a house as that! and also fancy, if you can, two such men as those we saw riding with that carriage being introduced to us, perhaps at a ball, and then inquiring where we lived! Only fancy how pleasant it would be to tell them that we lodged at a little low house, with two small windows in front of it."

"For goodness' sake, Agatha, what *would* you propose then?" said her mother, looking a great deal provoked at her pertinacity, and the more so, perhaps, because she felt such very perfect sympathy with all she said.

"I will tell you at once, ma'am, what I should propose, if you wish to hear it," replied Agatha, who was really becoming every day cleverer and cleverer; "I would not propose that you should take a house that is most abominably dear, but, on the contrary, that you should take the house which is, beyond all comparison, the cheapest we have seen. I should propose that, without trotting about in this horrid manner any more, you should at once go back to the house with the balcony, and secure that for as many months as you think we are likely to stay."

"The house with the balcony, Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, in dismay. "You must certainly be joking, child. You know very well that they asked for that house exactly double the price we might get the cottage for; you cannot possibly suppose that I would give such a rent as that?"

"Very well, ma'am. Of course you must do as you please; I am sure I do not mean to dictate. You asked for my opinion, and I have given it. You cannot blame me for saying what I think when you desire me to do so."

"But, Agatha, how is it possible that you can call the very handsomest lodging we have seen in the whole place the cheapest? Why, they asked three hundred francs a month for it, my dear. I really believe you do not know what you are talking about."

"Oh, yes I do, ma'am. I beg your pardon, but I know perfectly well what I am talking about. The Balcony House is three hundred francs a month, and the little hole of a cottage that you talk of is one hundred and fifty, and, such being their respective rents, my opinion most decidedly is, that the Balcony House is the cheaper of the two."

"Well, my dear, perhaps you are right after all, as a matter of comparison, which, to be sure, is the only fair way of judging anything. But, nevertheless, you must allow that three hundred francs a month is a great deal for us to pay for a mere summer lodging, where, of course, we should never, with our present strict plans of economy, think of giving a party."

"Whether you give parties or not, mamma, makes not the slightest difference in the question, which is simply whether it will be best and most prudent, under all the circumstances, to cram your family into such an oven of a place as the cottage during the vehement heat of a German summer, without the slightest chance of their dismal imprisonment being enlivened by a single acquaintance, and that for the sake of saving about thirty pounds upon the expenses of the whole year."

"Why, to be sure, Agatha, as you put it," replied her mother, thoughtfully, "it does seem almost a pity to deny ourselves what would be so very agreeable, for the sake of thirty pounds upon the whole year, and it is impossible to deny that it would make a wonderful difference in the style of our appearance; and Bertha Harrington certainly does pay a very handsome sum, which, of course, I know must help us greatly. But I am terrified, Agatha, at the idea of getting into trouble again."

"Nonsense, mamma, there is not the least danger of it," replied Agatha, increasing in energy as she perceived the success of her efforts. "The only real danger of your getting into trouble, as you call it, arises from your not keeping constantly before your eyes the ruinous mischief which must ever be sure to arise from half-measures. In the first place, the continuance of Bertha

Harrington's four hundred a-year of course depends upon her being *decently* lodged and accommodated. In the next, you must be aware that the prospects of Maria and myself depend altogether upon the class of people among whom we take our place in every new circle we get into. How perfectly absurd it would be for us to put down our names at the residence, and transmit to the lady in waiting our letter of introduction to the dowager grand-duchess, with no better address to give than your thirty-shilling-a-week lodging, next door to the butcher's!—that is what I mean by a half-measure, mamma. If we are to lodge next door to the butcher, burn your letter to the duchess, and let us creep in and out of our hole in a manner to be as little noticed as possible. Another half-measure, observe, is the absurdity of straining every nerve, and running to the very brink of destruction, in order to obtain elegant dresses, and then to come here and take such a lodging for us as will give us a very equivocal appearance in point of character if we put them on. If saving up money, ma'am, is really your only object, what you ought to have done was to buy each of us, and yourself into the bargain, two or three decent-looking coloured calico gowns before we left England—they wear an immense while, you know, and would have been as good as new now—a good stout shawl and a straw bonnet for each of us would have completed our costumes, and *then* we might with perfect propriety have taken your favourite lodging next the butcher, and, perhaps, as I believe we are rather well-looking girls, we might, if we had any luck, have got up a little flirtation with his sons or nephews."

"Good Heaven, Agatha, how you do run on!" replied the fully-convinced, yet high-spirited Mrs. Roberts. "As the woman of the house has thought proper to run away and leave us to ourselves, I have not the slightest objection, my dear, to sit here and listen to you, for you express yourself very much in my own style—I mean to say that you speak with a good deal of eloquence and good sense. It is a sort of inheritance, Agatha, and you ought to be thankful for it. But to be quite honest with you, my dear child, I never did really think that poor-looking place would do for us—only, you know, I always consider it right to check your lively imagination a little. However, on the present occasion, I believe we agree tolerably well on the main points of the case; and if this tiresome woman would but come back to take our answer about this dismal place, the best thing we can do, I suspect, will be to return to that abominably dear Balcony House at once, and secure it; for I really cannot trot about all the evening without knowing where I am to lay my weary head at night. But you must observe, Agatha, that in taking the Balcony House, I make a great effort for the gratification and advantage of my family, and the high rent must be made up by economy in other things. You and Maria must be very careful about your washing, and I most

certainly shall not allow any fruit after dinner, nor any cream, except just for your father and me at breakfast."

This important discussion being thus happily brought to a conclusion, Mrs. Roberts announced to the civil Alsatian with great dignity that "*Son maison était abominablement petit, et qu'il fallait chercher une autre plus convenable à leur rang.*" The good frau made an extremely low courtesy, not quite sure that she rightly understood what the lady said, but construing, by a sort of instinctive consciousness of disappointment, the repeated noddings of Mrs. Roberts's head into a civil assurance that she liked her house very much, but that, somehow or other, it would not do for her.

The return of the purveying detachment, which had seemed to the party they had left to be most wonderfully long delayed, was hailed almost with a shout.

"Well, my dear," said Mr. Roberts, "what's the news? Are we to stay in this dull, and doubtless equally dear house? Are we to lodge with the wolves in those dismal-looking woods up yonder? or have you, with your usual cleverness and care for us all, been able to find some tolerably pleasant little lodging, where we may be quiet and comfortable, and save money till the winter and the balls come again?"

This speech was pronounced with so much good humour, and such a very evident intention to be amiable, that Mrs. Roberts could not avoid bestowing about three-tenths of a smile upon him as she replied, "You may be quite sure, my dear, that I have not fagged myself into this state for nothing. When I undertake to do a thing, I believe I generally do it well. You will neither have to remain in a nasty, cheating, vulgar inn, Mr. Roberts, nor yet will I condemn you to sleep with the wolves. But for mercy's sake give me something to drink. The fatigue I have gone through since I left this house is something past belief!"

"Ring the bell, Maria!" replied the attentive husband, himself hastening to disencumber his panting helpmate from all such parts of her drapery as it was convenient to part with.

"Moselle, my dear?—shall it be moselle?—mixed with a little water, I suppose? I do certainly think that they have got the brightest sunshine here that is to be found anywhere. It would almost be a relief, wouldn't it, to fix one's eyes for a few minutes upon the deep shade of some of our London streets?"

"Do go and get me a towel, Maria, out of the bed-room; I feel as if I should die with the heat," exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, suiting the action to the word, as soon as the light step of her obedient daughter had procured for her the ample instrument which she required for her relief, and appearing to be greatly relieved after continuing the use of it for some minutes. Agatha, meanwhile,

who had shared her labours, though apparently without suffering quite so much therefrom, contented herself by stretching her length upon the sofa, and regaling herself with a refreshing draught similar to that of her mamma, and obtained by the flattering aid of her brother, who, though by no means particularly famous for waiting upon his sisters, condescended to do so in the present instance, for the sake of indulging in a few whispered inquiries as to the result of the lodging-hunting.

"I hope, Agatha," said he, "you have not let my mother indulge in any very violent economical whims in finding a house for us? You don't imagine, I suppose, that I have been enjoying a tête-à-tête with my papa all the time you have been away. This costume, you know, is perfectly *comme il faut* for a travelling man of fashion, and adorned as you now see me, I have already found my way into the very centre of the fashion and gaiety of Baden: and a devilish nice place it seems to be; much too elegant, I can tell you, for me to submit to be seen coming out of a barrack by way of a lodging. What sort of a place has she got for us?"

"She has got, or rather, Mr. Edward, I have got, what I conceive to be the most stylish lodgings in the town. I suspect, from what I saw as we walked about, that many of the best people stay at the hotels, but I knew it was no good to try for that, so, after a monstrous tough battle, I fairly badgered her out of taking a horrid little house with a parcel of cupboards in it; and now we have got a very genteel-looking concern, I assure you."

"You were quite right, my dear, for more reasons than one," replied her brother, displaying his pretty, regular, and particularly small teeth by a satirical sort of one-sided smile, which he had for some weeks past been very successfully practising before his mirror—"quite right, 'Gatha; nothing in nature is so horrible as for a fellow to make play and get into the dwelling of a pretty, well-dressed girl, with whom he has danced at a ball, and find her ensconced in a vulgar one-windowed parlour, looking more like a dungeon than a fitting abode for beauties. Therefore, my dear, though I am vastly obliged to you for my share of your good deeds, I give you credit for sufficient common sense to have made you do all you have done for your own sake or Maria's."

"And I declare to you, Edward, whatever you may think of it," returned his sister, "that the doing what is right and proper by that little dreamy thing, Bertha, had some share in making me stand such a battle against mamma's economy. I do think that she pays enough to give her a right to expect decent lodgings. Don't you?"

"Why, as to that, my dear, I cannot say that my conscience would trouble me if the young lady were lodged in a tea-kettle. Her situation is quite different from that of yourself and Maria.

You have both of you got to find husbands, and find them you must, or I shall kill you, for the having a pair of old maids for sisters would be considerably more than I could stand. Yet it is no very easy matter, either, though you are pretty-looking girls too. But as I suspect that you will have devilish little money, and as the daughter of a *ci-devant* banker has no very illustrious rank to distinguish her, I know the thing won't be easy, especially as there are a pair of ye. But as to Bertha, the affair in her case is altogether different. She is already provided for. I have quite made up my mind to marry her, though I certainly do think that she is altogether the most uninteresting little animal that I ever saw in the shape of a young girl. I feel, however, that it is a duty to my family as well as to myself, and I shall do it. But I do wish she were a little more attractive."

"Surely, Edward, you must allow that she is rather pretty?" said his sister.

"I don't know what you mean by *rather pretty*," replied the young man. "Her eyes, nose, and mouth, are all in their right places, I suppose; but there is nothing in the very least degree attractive about her. She is not ugly, certainly; I do not mean to say she is, and I know well enough that her fortune, for a young fellow without title, would make her a capital good match even if she were. So that I have no notion of complaining of what chance has thrown in my way—far from it. I am, on the whole, very well pleased about it. But what I should LIKE, Agatha, if I could have everything quite my own way, would be to see her admired by all the men that looked at her; and then you know there would be some fun in snapping my fingers at them all, knowing that I had the game in my own hand. Besides, it would render the love-making, which *must* come some day or other, you know, so much more easy. If I could but see one really fine fashionable fellow admire her, I should begin the business at once. And I think I will venture to say that I should not be very long before I brought her into a proper frame of mind. But now, I confess, I never think of the job without yawning. I positively dread the having to dance with her. But you need not look so frightened, Agatha; I know it must be done, child, as well as you do, and do it I shall, all ingood time."

By the time the cautiously muttered conversation between the brother and sister had reached this point, Mrs. Roberts began to find herself in a considerable degree relieved from the superabundant caloric produced by her vehement exertions in the service of her family; and having drained the last drop from her second goblet of moselle and water, and her towel being exchanged for her pocket-handkerchief, she indulged in a sprinkling of eau-de-Cologne, and said, "Now then, sir, you must please to exert yourself a little. You must ring the bell, and order the bill to be

brought. You must also see about finding a porter to carry our luggage. The place they are to carry it to is the Balcony House, just before you come to the hotel with the sign of the Black Eagle. That is very easily settled," she continued, after the thoughtful pause of a moment, "we know the worst of it; it will cost us a few francs, and there's an end of the plague of baggage for the next three months or so; but the difficulty lies in finding out how we are to convey *ourselves*. The daylight will last for hours yet; and I can't stay here wasting my time, when I might be settling myself comfortably in our beautiful new lodgings. As far as I am concerned, however, there is no difficulty. I can go wrapped up as I did before. Nobody will know me again, I'll answer for it. But I don't know what to do about the girls. Agatha must give up her mourning bonnet and cloak, I suppose, to Bertha; and without the thick crape veil there will be no safety for her, she is so very striking; and you, sir, I am sure I don't know what in the world we are to do with you. Upon my word, you are too bad to be seen; and I really would not have you known again, when we set off properly in our own characters, for fifty pounds."

"Fifty pounds, my dear! Well, that is a good deal, to be sure, in order to keep a man from being taken for himself. However, you may do with me exactly whatever you like; I am ready and willing to get into a sack, or into a basket, like old Sir John Falstaff, if you can but manage to have me carried along," said Mr. Roberts, with great good humour.

"There is no joke in it, sir, I can tell you," replied his wife, with a good deal of severity. "What is the use of my exerting myself as I have done, or of making such an effort as I must do, in order to enable me to pay for the beautiful lodgings I have taken, if we are all to be brought down *slap* from the air and style of a family of fashion, which, for the sake of my children, I am quite determined to keep up, by your being seen such a figure as you are now?"

"Well, wife, well!" returned the *ci-devant* citizen, giving an expressive look to the sleeve of his coat, which was still a very respectable garment, "I have told you that you may do what you like with me; and so you may, my dear, for I don't care a farthing how you manage it, so that you do but contrive to bring me to the bed I am to sleep in, by ten o'clock or thereabouts, for I really am very tired. But still, though I don't want to oppose you in anything, I can't help saying that I do think travelling about has turned your head a little. Why, in Heaven's name, wife, should you set us all up for a *family of fashion*? How can a London banker's family, with seven hundred a year, ever be mistaken for any such thing? A family of fashion means a nobleman's family, as I take it! or, maybe, that of a wealthy aristocratical Member of Parliament, or that of a long-descended tip-top baronet. But I do not believe, wife, that anybody in the whole world ever dreamed of

a family like ours being taken for *people of fashion*. I wish you would not say that any more, my dear, because it makes me afraid that we shall all get laughed at."

"You may take my word for it, Mr. Roberts, that you would get laughed at, and most deservedly too, if anybody could hear you putting forth such fusty, musty, old-fashioned nonsense, by way of law. All that sort of stuff might have done very well, good man, some half a century ago, but now you might as well expect people to wear full-bottomed cauliflower wigs, powdered as white as snow, as listen to such humdrum."

"Well, my dear, I always like best that you should have your own way, because I think it makes us all more comfortable; and, therefore, I shall never make any objection to your calling yourself a lady of fashion, and all the rest of us a family of fashion, if you like it. But you will not persuade me, nevertheless, Sarah, that we *are*, any of us, at all of the same class as those who are called people of fashion in England."

"And what on earth do you suppose made me decide upon leaving England, Mr. Roberts?" returned his lady, with a very expressive smile, which said, as plainly as a smile could speak, "Silly man! you have stumbled upon the truth without knowing it!" But, plain-spoken as the smile was, Mrs. Roberts would not trust to it, but rising from her seat, and shaking her garments into proper order for again setting forth into the garish daylight of Baden-Baden, she said, "Depend upon it, Mr. Roberts, and take it into your mind once for all, that I would have seen all the foreign countries we have passed through already, and all that I intend to pass through into the bargain, one and all of them, swamped and sunk for evermore to the bottom of the sea, before I would have left my English comforts, my tidy store-room, and my stair-carpets, and all the rest of it, to scramble up and down the world as we are doing now, unless I had happened to know, from good authority, that we *might* be taken for people of fashion abroad, though we could not at home."

"If it is all the same to you, my dear," said Mr. Roberts, who had very meekly listened to his lady's long harangue, but who now certainly did look very tired indeed, "and if you could contrive to let me be put into the first set that goes, I shall be very thankful, for, somehow or other, I do feel so sleepy that I can hardly keep my eyes open. Do manage, my dear, to let me be one of the first."

"First or last, my dear," replied his wife, "you will be the most difficult person to manage of the whole party, you may depend upon that." "I am sure, Sarah, I am very sorry for it," said the worthy man, in the most penitent tone imaginable. "I would do anything in the world that I could to help you out of your trouble, if I did but know how; but I really do not, any more than if I was a child born but yesterday."

"Of course you don't, sir," returned Mrs. Roberts, "we all know that, and what you cannot do for yourself we must do for you. By the bye, Edward, don't you think that your father could put on your Greek cap?—the red one, I mean, with the blue tassel. You will never wear it here, I'll answer for it, nor your father either, poor man, for, to be sure, he will look queer enough it, won't he? But if he was to put that on, and just walk with an unlighted cigar in his mouth, he might meet all the fine folks in the place, and defy any one of them to know him afterwards—he that never smokes, and never wore a Greek cap in his life. Don't you think it would do, Edward?"

"Why, yes, ma'am," replied her son, "I think he would be perfectly safe. Only, if you please, you must not insist upon my attending upon him in person. He is perfectly welcome to my cap, but I cannot promise for my gravity."

After a few minutes' further conversation, the matter was settled by Mr. Roberts adopting, with the most scrupulous exactness, the costume above mentioned, and in this guise following his still muffled lady, at the distance of a few yards, till he saw her safely concealed in the Balcony House. He then boldly entered after her, and as soon as she had deposited him in the hands of the landlady, she returned with all speed to the hotel, and having seen the baggage of the party off before her, she set about marshalling the young ladies in the most prudent style her fertile imagination could suggest.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DURING the whole of these domestic discussions and manœuvrings, Bertha Harrington had been seated at a little side window of the hotel, which, opening from one of the most obscure bedrooms in it, commanded a view that made her nerves thrill with delight, and caused her with deep sincerity to bless the benignity of Providence, which, notwithstanding her dreadful sufferings, permitted her to feel with all the keenness of youthful sensation, that, she had still the power of enjoyment left within her, and that it was only necessary for her to look out upon the lovely face of nature to taste it.

The absorbing feeling of admiration with which she sat gazing upon the objects visible from the window of the little room into which she had retreated, while the Roberts family were discussing their movements, and the masquerading manner in which they were to be performed, did her nothing but good; for there was that in the landscape which awakened too many fanciful thoughts and memories to leave her any leisure to mourn over the perversity of the destiny which had thrown her into companionship with so much absurdity. The excellent and truly pious re-

solutions which had arisen during her solemn and solitary walk in Strasbourg cathedral, contributed rather to assist than check the effect of the scenes among which she now found herself, for they led her to cherish every thought and every feeling possessed of sufficient interest to lead her meditations from the fearful theme upon which, as she well knew, she had brooded more than was good for the health of either mind or body. Never, since the terrible event which had caused her banishment from her native land, had Bertha experienced any emotion so nearly approaching to happiness as that produced by the sight of the dark forest. Her mind was in no state to enjoy scenes of gay dissipation, even had she been surrounded by companions as agreeable to her taste as those now around her were the contrary. Pleasure, commonly so called, she felt to be repugnant to her inclination, and unsuitable to her condition; but her imagination seemed to have gained all that her other faculties had lost. She longed to turn from what was present, but in which she could take no interest, to what had passed, ages and ages ago, on the spot so widely distant from her native home, and to which accident had thus strangely brought her. And there she sat at the little window, most luxuriously forgetting how she got there, and with her fancy as free from every image connected with the race of Robertses as if none of them had ever been born. There she sat, while that high-minded family were arranging their plans; and there she would most contentedly have sat for hours longer, had not Mrs. Roberts suddenly burst in upon her, in order to summon her to take her place in the procession which had been at length arranged.

Mrs. Roberts always made a point of being very civil to Miss Harrington, and upon this occasion had addressed her in an accent of commiseration, which was quite affectionate.

"Dear me—dear me! I am afraid you must have been moped to death, my dear, sitting here so long all alone," had been her exclamation on opening the door; civilly adding, "but you must please to excuse us all, my dear Bertha, for we have been too busy to have any time left for politeness."

Bertha first started, as if a pistol had been fired off at her ear, and then said very eagerly,

"Oh dear no, ma'am, not the least in the world! I have been very happy indeed."

At that moment an idea which had more than once before suggested itself to the sagacious mind of Mrs. Roberts came upon her anew, with all the force of conviction.

"That girl," thought she, "is more than half an idiot; but no mortal living shall ever find it out by my help. Poor dear creature! it will be a mercy to marry her, whether she likes it or not, to the son of such a family as ours, where she will be so sure to be taken care of. Poor dear creature!"

As she mentally breathed this exclamation, Mrs. Roberts felt a pleasing sensation at her heart, not very easy to be accurately defined. She would herself, and quite sincerely, have described it as a feeling of benevolence, arising from the conviction that this weakness of mind in poor dear Bertha would render her own watchful care of her destiny invaluable, and make the adopting her into the bosom of her happy and highly-gifted family one of the most amiable acts that ever were performed. Other people might have fancied the agreeable sensation to have taken its rise from a sort of prophetic consciousness that there could be no great difficulty in making such a fool marry whomsoever she chose to put in her way; or the source of this complacent feeling might have been twofold, and compounded, though not quite in equal portions, of both. However this may be, Mrs. Roberts did set off from the hotel to take possession of her nice lodgings in the Balcony House, in very particular good humour with herself and all the world, and with the happy persuasion that none of the fine people whom she speedily meant to adopt as her intimate friends would ever find out how she got there.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE next morning rose in all the animating brightness of German sunshine; and it would have been difficult perhaps, even in the enjoyable and ever-enjoyed retreat of Baden-Baden, to have found any party more inclined to congratulate themselves upon being there. The worthy Mr. Roberts strolled out before the hour of breakfast; and having found his way to the public rooms, and ascertained, by the aid of no tongue but that which was native to him, the easy rate of subscription by which he might be admitted to all the delights they offered, came back with a smiling face to join his family at the morning meal, with his fancy full of the beautiful acacia trees, under whose shade he might sit and read the newspaper all day long, or, by way of variety, go to sleep as much as he liked. Mrs. Roberts, by the help of her native sagacity, aided by a few inquiries from her landlady, had ascertained that there were persons of distinction at the baths from almost every country under heaven, and that they all seemed to be living together on the most intimate terms imaginable. The two Miss Robertses had, in like manner, become equally well aware of the celibacy of one English lord, two ditto Irish, three baronets, and a very fair sprinkling of minor treasures in the same available condition. Edward was in no degree less contented than the rest of the family, and Bertha Harrington's state of mind has been already described.

"I flatter myself that you will allow I have done well for you this time," said Mrs. Roberts, looking round the room complacently,

and stirring her tea with a smooth equable movement, that seemed to emanate from the pleasant condition of her mind. "Isn't this a nice room, girls?"

"Lovely," replied Maria, "and you might give a beautiful party in it, if we could but get acquainted with enough people."

"It will not be very difficult to do that," said her brother, "if we set properly about it."

"That is the great secret, Edward," returned his mother with an approving nod, "and we must join our wits together to see how we can set about it. The fact is, that nothing can be hoped for of any kind in the way of gaiety, unless we draw a few eyes upon us at once. Of course it will cost something, and so will our daily bread, but there is no avoiding it. You must all of you be exceedingly economical in other respects, and take the greatest possible care to save in every way that is not likely to injure our appearance in the eyes of the world."

"You are quite right there, mamma," said Agatha, with solemnity. "It is, in fact, the only system, as every day's experience convinces me, by which people of moderate fortune can pass through life respectably. People who are indifferent to the opinion of their fellow-creatures are never likely to conduct themselves with propriety in any way. Such indifference ought to be avoided by all well-disposed people; but when young women are concerned, it becomes a positive duty."

"I am sure it is a great pleasure, my dear," said her father, looking at her with great admiration, "to hear a young person of your age express herself so sensibly. It does the greatest credit to your excellent mother, and clearly proves how perfectly right she has been in giving you all the advantages of travelling into foreign parts. I am quite convinced there is nothing like it for the improvement of the mind; and I don't mean to deny that it is for the improvement of the body too, my dears, for, thank God! we all of us seem to be in perfect health, and certainly in point of looks nobody can deny the improvement."

"Thank you, papa, for my share of the compliment," said Maria. "But now," she added, "let us lose no time, but talk a little seriously about our manner of setting off. The first great question is—are we to have a carriage? Pretty nearly everything, in my opinion, depends upon that."

There was a moment's pause. Every eye save that of Bertha, which was fixed with decorous gravity upon the table-cloth, turned, as by common consent, towards Mrs. Roberts.

"It is the first great question, Maria," she said at length. "There can be no doubt of it."

"And how is it to be answered, ma'am?" said Edward, rather sternly, for his heart and soul were full of delicious visions of driving—an exquisite costume for this exercise being one of his

latest Parisian acquisitions. "How is it to be answered? Because a good deal will depend upon that, I promise you, as to the manner in which I shall dispose of myself."

"I quite understand the anxiety you must all feel on the subject," resumed Mrs. Roberts; "it is perfectly natural; for the importance of the question is immense! Nevertheless, nothing must be decided upon hastily."

"No, no, we must not be in a hurry to plunge headlong into unnecessary expenses, my dears," said Mr. Roberts, remembering that at that particular moment he had not, to the best of his knowledge and belief, above fifty pounds in his banker's hands. "Travelling," he added, "is beyond all question a most delightful and a most improving thing, but it costs a monstrous deal of money; there is no denying that; and a carriage costs a monstrous deal of money too, and if you will all of you take my advice, you will manage to do without it here. The country, they say, is beautiful, you know, and I am sure the weather is beautiful too, and why should you not be contented with making pleasant walking parties? Your mother is an excellent walker; and if we should be lucky enough to make some pleasant chatty acquaintances who can walk with her, I am sure she would enjoy it extremely; and so you would too, every one of you; and therefore I don't see the good sense of running headlong into a great expense that really and truly cannot do any of you any good. There! now I have given you my opinion, and I shall say no more about it, one way or the other."

It really required a good deal of moral courage in good Mr. Roberts to say thus much, for he knew pretty well that his advice was not likely to prove palatable to either of his *high-spirited* offspring. As to his lady, he did not by any means feel equally certain that what he had said would be displeasing to her. He most truly believed her to be one of the most accomplished managers in the world, but as he was every day becoming more and more aware of the great abilities and corresponding strength of character (and of will) of his children, he was not without hope that by thus boldly declaring that he did not conceive a carriage necessary, he might be rendering her task of keeping them in order less difficult; but even with this hope he did not feel sufficiently easy in his mind to venture to look about him after he had ceased to speak, and therefore began very assiduously to butter and to salt, and to cut into dainty little sections a piece of toasted bread, which, of course, obliged him to keep his eyes also earnestly fixed upon his plate. And lucky was it for him, good man, that he did so, for it would have required a firmer spirit than he possessed to have stood unmoved the battery of eyes which at once poured forth their flashing hostility upon him. His son, who had just broken the shell of an egg, sat with his teaspoon in one hand,

and his egg-cup in the other, as if suddenly turned into stone ; his eyes the while distended to their utmost limits, and fixed upon his offending parent with such a mixture of rage and rebellion in their glance as would have shaken the old gentleman severely had he been unfortunate enough to have seen it. The whole frame of his daughter Agatha, too, quivered with angry agitation as she listened to him ; and there was such a curl of her lip as she tossed her head, and turned her eyes from him towards her mother, that it required no very deep study of physiognomy to understand the appeal. Maria turned as red as scarlet, and tears, of no very tender kind, started to her eyes. As to Mrs. Roberts herself, her admiring husband might have looked her full in the face at that moment without running any risk of being frightened. She smiled with great good-humour, and she nodded her head to him in a way that he might perhaps have thought very encouraging if he had seen it : but it was quite as well that he did not, for if he had he would have been deceived by a smile, as many other good men have been before him, for, rightly interpreted, it only meant, "Go on, my dear, and say what you like ; I have no wish in the world to stop you. Your opinion will not have much weight in the matter, either way." The well-behaved wife, however, said aloud immediately after, and in a tone of very proper decorum, "It is not a question which ought to be settled in a hurry, Mr. Roberts : we will talk about it ;" a reply that must have had some wisdom in it, for it satisfied everybody.

"And what shall we begin with?" said Edward. "I have a dozen things in my head that must all be done, but I don't know which to do first. I suppose you will want me, ma'am, to go to the rooms for you, and see about the subscriptions?" he added in a whisper that was for her alone. "I will speak to you in the next room in a moment," she replied.

And then the breakfast proceeded satisfactorily to its conclusion, amidst a variety of laudatory remarks on the pleasant aspect of the place, and the particularly nice situation of their lodgings. A glance of the eye from the mother to the son, as the party rose from the table, caused him to stroll with an idle, lounging air into a pretty little second drawing-room, where she immediately joined him, and, having closed the door of communication, led him to the window and thus addressed him : "You behaved exceedingly well just now, Edward—exceedingly well indeed. I give you great credit for it, my dear boy ; for I saw plainly enough what you felt, and was in a terrible fright lest you should burst out into some violent remonstrance. But you behaved beautifully, and you know well enough, Edward, that you may safely leave all such matters to me ; for, in the first place, I believe that you and I think pretty much alike on most subjects, and in the next, there is nobody that

can bring your father round, when he has got a troublesome crotchet in his head, but myself."

"Quite true, ma'am, we all know that," replied her son. "So now then, I suppose, we are to understand that we are not to be led about the high-roads like a set of dusty geese, to seek what we can find? You mean to say that we are to have a carriage, don't you?"

"Yes, certainly I do, my dear. You cannot surely suspect me of being so deplorably ignorant of everything connected with people of fashion, as not to know that the most fatal thing that could be done for you all would be letting you trudge about on foot. I will not, however, deny, my dear boy, that there will be considerable difficulty in paying for it. Your father is right enough there, poor man; he knows only too well, I am sorry to say, the state of the account at the banker's. The fact is, you see, that people are altogether mistaken about Paris. I don't believe it is the least bit cheaper than London, when everything is taken into consideration; for if society does not cost so much in one way, the immense difference as to the number of fine people one gets acquainted with brings up the expense in another. In short, I do not scruple to say that I was mistaken in my estimates of Paris expenses; I am not the least ashamed to confess it. Everybody is liable to such an error as that, though it is not everybody who will own it as freely. However, we all know that experience bought is better than taught; and if I have paid for my experience, you may be very sure that I shall take care to profit by it."

"We all know that you are a most excellent manager," replied her son; "but now if you please, ma'am," he added, "I want you to tell me what I am to do at the rooms? Don't you think that it would be more economical to subscribe for the whole season than for a month at a time? Here is the paper that the woman of the house gave me, which contains all particulars."

Mrs. Roberts having examined the paper, and found that the rate of subscription was higher in proportion as the time subscribed for was short, energetically exclaimed, "Of course, my dear, where money runs rather scarce, as I confess that just now it does with us, we must contrive to get everything at the lowest price possible. We must not think of subscribing by the month, Edward; it is quite out of the question. The price by the season really seems to be wonderfully cheap, and that is the way we must take it. People who really understand economy never overlook that sort of advantage. Besides, you may depend upon it, Edward, that the taking such lodgings as these, and setting ourselves down as subscribers for the whole season, will at once make us of importance to the whole society. People will be eager enough to get introduced to us."

"And about the carriage, ma'am? I suppose I may as well go at once and pick out a good carriage and horses, and a respectable-

looking coachman ; for of course you and the girls will choose to drive out this morning ? ”

“ Why yes, my dear, I think you may as well do it all under one ; only you must take care, Edward, that the carriage does not absolutely drive up to the door before I have spoken to your father on the subject. I do not at all anticipate any real difficulty about it ; when I make up my mind to do a thing, I believe you all know that I generally do it well ; but at the same time, Edward, I always make a point of showing the most perfect respect to your excellent father in all things, and I trust that my children will always follow my example. ”

“ Of course we shall, ma'am, we always do, ” replied the young man. “ But now, if you please, you must give me the money to pay the subscription to the rooms. I literally came away from Paris without a five-franc piece in the world. ”

“ I have no doubt of it, my dear, ” said his mother, with a sympathetic sigh, “ and I hope and trust we shall contrive to manage better here. By the bye, my dear Edward, I hope you won't mind having no more eggs for breakfast, It is by attention to all these little things, that real good managers contrive to do so much more than other people. ”

“ Oh, no, ma'am, I don't care about the eggs at all, ” replied her son, counting the pieces she consigned to him for the subscription. “ Besides, ” thought he, as he pocketed the money and left the room, “ one can always get a breakfast at a coffee-house, if one is starved at home. ”

Having dismissed her darling son, who was, as she thankfully exclaimed to her heart, as useful as he was ornamental, Mrs. Roberts returned to the room in which they had breakfasted, and in which she found Bertha Harrington alone. It instantly occurred to her that the half-witted young heiress would see nothing unreasonable in being asked to share the expenses of a carriage, and also of the family subscription, which was to open the rooms, and all their manifold delights, to the whole party for the season. Bertha was seated at one of the windows with an open volume in her hand ; but she was not reading, her eyes being fixed on the pine-covered hill that at no great distance bounded the landscape.

“ I am quite glad I have found you here by yourself, my dear Bertha, for I want to speak to you about a little business. I think your dear good aunt, Lady Morton, told me before we left Paris, that she had given you fifty pounds, my dear, being half a year's allowance of pocket money ? ”

It has been stated that the eyes of Bertha Harrington were very large eyes, and, moreover, both in shape and colour, they were very beautiful eyes ; but as to their expression, it would be imprudent to speak with equal certainty, because scarcely any two people agreed about it. Some thought, of whom her poor mother was

one, that no eyes ever possessed the power of expressing tenderness and affection so touchingly. Others, of whom again her mother was one, and her *ci-devant* governess another, were of opinion that there was at times a more striking expression of deep thought, and strong intellectual power, in her eyes, than in any others they had ever looked into. While again others declared, and of these Mrs. Roberts was one, that when Bertha Harrington opened her great large eyes, wide, and stared full in one's face, she looked most completely like a fool. If Mrs. Roberts had never thought this before, she would most certainly have thought so now, for assuredly there was a sort of vacancy in the stare with which Miss Harrington received this allusion to her private affairs, that might have appeared to many like the unmeaning glance of utter stupidity. But Mrs. Roberts saw nothing in it to surprise her; she had been for some time convinced that Bertha Harrington was very nearly an idiot, and, with her usual amiable consideration, she determined to treat her accordingly.

"Don't look so frightened, my dear child," said she, with a smile that was really quite involuntary, "nobody is going to scold you about your pocket-money. All I want, my dear Bertha, is, that you should try to understand what I am going to say to you, and then I am sure you will answer me as you ought to do. The truth is, Bertha, that our long journey from Paris has been dreadfully expensive—gentlemen are always so extravagant upon a journey. And now, of course, a variety of new expenses come upon us, which must be met—unless, indeed, I were cruel enough to keep you and the other poor dear girls out of everything gay and pleasant, and that I certainly will not do. Now, you heard what Mr. Roberts said just now about the carriage, didn't you?" "No, ma'am," replied Bertha.

Mrs. Roberts shook her head, but went on, raising her voice a little. "Whether you heard him or not, my dear, what he said was, that he feared the expense of a carriage was more than he could stand just now, and yet I am sure that without it you can none of you go anywhere; and that is the reason, my dear, why I wanted to ask you, whether you did not think that, out of your very large allowance for pocket-money, you could contrive to pay something towards a carriage. Don't you think you could, my dear?" Bertha paused for half a moment before she answered, and then said, "No, ma'am."

There was a decision in the succinct directness of this reply which a little startled Mrs. Roberts, but she thought that the peculiarly composed air with which it was uttered had something so stultified in it, that she was more than ever confirmed in her belief of the young lady's mental deficiency; so, giving her a good humoured, condescending little pat upon the shoulder, she said,

"Come, come, my dear child, I must not have you talk non-

sense. We know very well that you have more money than you know what to do with. So you must be a good girl, Bertha, and let me have fifteen pounds—or twenty would be better still—towards paying for a carriage. And when you have done this, I promise that you shall never be without one to ride in any single day as long as you stay.”

“If you will be so good as to write to my aunt Morton, ma’am,” said Bertha, rather demurely, “and explain your wishes to her, she will in return explain to you, I think, that the four hundred a year which you are to receive, if I continue in your family, is intended to include the accommodation of a carriage.”

“Do you think so, my dear?” returned Mrs. Roberts, colouring violently, and at once aware, with (as she told herself) all her usual quickness, that Bertha Harrington, like many other half-witted persons, was cunning enough about money. “Well, well, my dear,” she added, without the least apparent diminution of her good-humour, “we won’t say any more about it, then. I must try what I can do to persuade Mr. Roberts.”

And, to say truth, this unexpected display of cunning in the young heiress sent the managing lady off to her husband very nearly as well pleased as if she had carried the money she had asked for in her hand.

“We must take care what we are about, Mr. Roberts,” said she, as she luckily caught him in the act of taking up his hat and stick. “Miss Bertha Harrington, in consequence of what you said at breakfast, I suppose, has just given me to understand that she wishes me to write to her aunt, Lady Morton, in order to inquire whether *the accommodation of a carriage*—those were her very words—whether the accommodation of a carriage was not understood to be included in the four hundred a year which we are to receive, *if she stays with us.*”

Mr. Roberts produced a long but very gentle whistle.

“Not a word more upon the subject, my dear,” said he; “see about getting a comfortable carriage directly. Let it be the very first thing—do you understand?—the very first thing attended to.”

“Yes, my dear, I will,” replied Mrs. Roberts, with a sigh; “it is plain that there is no help for it!”

CHAPTER XX.

LUCKILY for the Roberts family, all the carriages in Baden-Baden were not yet engaged, so they were not obliged to incur the additional expense of sending either to Carlsruhe or Strasbourg to seek one, which, from the excited state in which the family feeling then was, respecting *real* good management and *true* economy, they certainly would have done, rather than commit the imprudence of

presenting themselves before the idlers of the baths without one. But Edward had the great good fortune of finding an equipage in every way suited to his wishes, having various traces on the somewhat queerly shaped panels that it had once been varnished, and being moreover lined with bright scarlet moreen, which the young man felt to be both dashing to the eyes that looked at it from without, and becoming to all the complexions that were seen within. He really justified all his mother's hopes of him, by the spirited manner in which he issued his orders concerning the style in which the vehicle was to be prepared for his use. He spoke French, as a distinguished statesman once said of himself, with great audacity; and as he had the usual facility of youth, and a tolerably quick ear to assist him, he rarely met with a native Frenchman, of whom, luckily there were many at Baden, to whom he could not make himself intelligible. When he encountered a German, indeed, he often found that the national slowness of his constitution caused him to stumble at obstacles, over which the briskness of a Frenchman would have enabled him to scramble without difficulty. But, fortunately, the keeper of the livery-stables was a Frenchman, so that he understood the young gentleman tolerably well on the whole, though here and there he was a little puzzled.

"*Sacre—!*" began the youth. "How these *polissons confondus* of yours neglect the harness! I say, *vous scélérat*," turning to one of the helpers in the yard, "mind *vos coups*, for I'll *vous fouetter jusqu'à un pouce de votre vie*, if you send harness to me that has not been properly rubbed."

Fortunately, again, the helper was a German, and having answered "*ja wohl*" with great civility, he turned to his master, as the young gentleman strutted out of the yard, to inquire what the words meant, for he did not know exactly what he was wanted to do.

"The words mean that he is an ENGLISHMAN," replied the master of the establishment. "And one might often think they were hired by *la grande nation* to travel the world over on purpose to make the name detested. And if it be so, they do not take their wages for nothing."

By the time the carriage drove to the door of the Balcony House, the wardrobes of the Roberts family had been sufficiently unpacked for them to be ready to enter it without one shadow of doubt or misgiving respecting their good looks and general appearance.

"Here it comes!" cried Edward, who had for some time been stationed at the window, in his most *recherché* morning costume, awaiting its approach. "Here it comes, and if you are not all pleased with it, you may get the next yourselves, that's all."

These words caused Mrs. Roberts and her two highly-finished daughters to rush to the window from the looking-glass which ornamented the chimney-piece, where they had all three been

standing on tiptoe for the last five minutes, to take a final review of what they had been doing for the last hour or two.

"Oh ! it is exactly the sort of carriage I wished for !" exclaimed Maria, colouring with delight ; "so perfectly open, and so particularly calculated to show everybody in it to the greatest possible advantage, on account of the lining, you know, mamma, which is so capital for the complexion. You are a darling, Edward, and that's the truth."

"Nothing, indeed, *could* have been more completely what I wished for, my dear son," said Mrs. Roberts, turning her eyes from the carriage to his face, with infinite complacency. "But I confess I should have thought it rather strange if my own dear Edward had shown himself incapable of choosing a proper equipage for his mother and sisters. He is too much a part of myself for me to feel any such fear. But I thank you, my dear Edward, for having shown yourself so attentive and thoughtful about every particular. The colour of the lining was really very important, on account of your sisters, and you have hit the thing exactly. What do *you* say to it, Agatha ?"

"I approve it perfectly, ma'am," replied her eldest daughter, "but I beg to observe that the effect will be infinitely improved by my old blue shawl, the colour of which is so beautiful, and as fresh as ever it was ; this shawl must be thrown carelessly over the back of the carriage. And if your cloak also, ma'am, which is really so rich-looking as to give an air of dignity and consequence, were hung gracefully at your back, I certainly do think that, dressed as we all are, with Edward driving us, and that decent-looking coachman put in the dickey behind by way of a footman, we may set out without feeling the least objection to meeting again the same party we did yesterday."

"*I think so,*" returned her mother in a tone that left no doubt of her sincerity. "But, Agatha," she added, after meditating for a moment, "don't you think my beautiful cloak may be rather the worse for this display ? Remember what it cost, my dear ! I wish I could teach you a little of my economy, Agatha !"

"Nobody, ma'am, can justly reproach me with not being economical. Maria knows what sort of stockings I wear under my boots ; and there are many other things I could mention which might convince the most suspicious person of my being really and truly economical. But it is perfect nonsense, ma'am, to talk of hurting velvet. Everybody that understands anything about the matter is well aware that *nothing* can hurt velvet, and that is exactly the reason why people give such a monstrous price for it. It is exactly *that* which makes it so economical."

"There is truth in that, certainly, my dear," replied her mother.

"Run, Maria, will you ? there's a dear girl, and open the bottom drawer in my room, and there you will find it wrapped up in an old table-cloth. It will give exactly the sort of air which a person

like me, a little stout, you know, and the mother of a family, ought to have. You are a clever creature, Agatha, and nobody can doubt it."

"But upon my soul *I* shall doubt it," cried the lively Edward, who had been practising a few coachman's vagaries before the glass; "I shall doubt it d—nably, if she keeps us any longer with her preaching. Run, and get your blue rag, girl, at once—I know it's rather a good notion, but I'll be shot if I wait for it."

And having uttered these words, he darted out of the room, and installed himself on the coachbox, where, having coaxed the legitimate Jehu to repose himself on the seat behind, he solaced himself for the further delay of the ladies, by arranging the reins on his white-gloved fingers in the most approved style, and by attempting with infinite grace to remove a fly from the patient ear of one of the horses.

Meanwhile the ladies hastened to join him as soon as their decorative drapery had been obtained, and Miss Harrington summoned from the snug little apartment which had been assigned her. Had Bertha been quite aware of the resolute projects for display, which at this moment swelled the bosoms of Mrs. Roberts and her offspring, she might have shrunk from making a part of their *cortège*. But no such thought entered her head. She knew well enough, poor girl, that she should find them very wearisome companions, and it was decidedly a part of her proposed scheme of enjoyment at Baden, to get as much out of their way as possible; but she thought that by accompanying them in a drive or two, she should learn enough of the geography of the place to enable her to ramble about alone, without being puzzled as to the getting home again. She therefore joined the party the moment she was called upon to do so, and they set off in full glory for the library, that being the spot which the judicious Edward preferred to all others to begin with, as a sort of focus at which all the brightest emanations of rank, fashion, and beauty were sure to meet.

"But shall we not be likely to find papa there?" whispered Maria to her brother, upon his declaring their destination, and rising up from her seat in order to ask the question discreetly. "He won't get up if we do," replied the young man; "he told me so this morning."—"That is a comfort, to be sure," replied Maria; "but of course he will come and speak to us—and you know how he looks, Edward! Shall you like it? to be mixed up with such a very old-fashioned figure, at the very moment of first showing ourselves! Will it not be running into danger?"—"It is no good to talk about it, Maria," he replied, with an impatient action of both reins and whip. "You may depend upon it that there are many fashionable young people, besides ourselves, who have quizzical governors. It is one of the things one must bear, you know, like the tooth-ache, or anything else that can't be helped. It's no good to grum—

ble. Sit down, will you? Here are the same two fellows that we saw yesterday."

Mr. Edward was right. The same "two fellows" who had at once so terrified and enchanted the Roberts family on the preceding day, as they made their dusty entry to the town of Baden, were now seen approaching them on horseback, under the shade of the trees among which the drive to the rooms, the theatre, the library, and all the other gay things of Baden, passed. Edward had just turned his horses into this road as he perceived them; and between his anxiety to examine them and their horses, and the still greater anxiety to show off to advantage himself and his own, he pulled his reins to the left when he ought to have pulled them to the right, which not only gave him the appearance of intending to make a sort of chariot charge against the two horsemen, but produced the still more dangerous result of running his wheels within half an inch of a tolerably deep, open water-course, neatly fabricated by the roadside, for the purpose of carrying off the sudden torrents which are so apt, in all mountainous regions, to be rude, unless proper attention be paid to them. The two gentlemen who had thus innocently endangered the safety of our travellers, rode abreast; but fortunately their attention was not directed to the same object, the eyes of one being settled very fixedly upon the face of Miss Harrington, while those of his companion were engaged in watching the perilous progress of the wheels. Both gentlemen were well-looking, and of fashionable and rather distinguished appearance; and it struck Edward Roberts that he had heard one of them addressed as "my lord," when he had been making some inquiries at the library. This recollection sufficed to overcome every thought of coachmanlike precaution in his mind, and a very serious accident would have unquestionably followed, had not the young man whose eye was upon the wheels, and who was not the noble individual that had absorbed the soul of our incautious young friend, suddenly sprung from his steed, and turned the heads of the misguided carriage-horses, suffering his own to trot off in whatever direction he preferred.

Bertha Harrington was the only person in the carriage who was at all aware of the importance of the service thus rendered, for she only had perceived how dangerously their carriage had swerved; while the young nobleman, first learning the peril from the expression of the face upon which he had been gazing, and then from the marks left by the suddenly turned wheels, rode round the carriage to the corner in which Miss Harrington was seated, and, taking off his hat, expressed his hope that the ladies had not been alarmed. "Alarmed!" screamed Mrs. Roberts, with all the strength of her lungs—"what is it, gentlemen? What, in the name of Heaven, has happened to us?" The displaced coachman had by this time descended from his seat on the dicky, and stood at the

horses' heads, uttering a few execrations in high Dutch, on the presumptuous ignorance of young English gentlemen on their travels; while the young man who had done the party the good service of saving them from being overturned into the ditch, perceiving that his assistance was no longer wanted, stepped to the side of the carriage at which Mrs. Roberts was screaming forth her unanswered questions; for the young nobleman who had addressed his polite inquiries as to the general state of the ladies' nerves to Miss Harrington, very pertinaciously awaited his answer from her, leaving the important lady who sat beside her utterly unnoticed. Very timely, therefore, was the approach of the elder of the two gentlemen to the other side of the vehicle, and very good-natured was the tone in which he informed the greatly excited Mrs. Roberts, that there was no further cause for alarm.

"But what *was* it then, sir?" she resumed in a more tranquil voice. "I am sure you are a most obliging person, and if there is really nothing the matter, we shall one and all be quite pleased with the accident that has led us to make your acquaintance. But what *was* the accident, sir?"

"Your horses swerved, ma'am," he replied, "and as there is a very awkward water-course on that side of the road, I thought there was no time to be lost in giving them a twist the other way."

Having said this, he made his bow, and retreated; and perceiving that his horse had taken leave to depart, he determined upon following him to his livery-stables, where there was little doubt that he would find him.

"I must look after my horse, Lynberry," said he, as he walked off towards the town. "You had better ride to the stables and meet me."

But the young Lord Lynberry thought he had better not ride in any direction which would take him out of sight of those wondrous eyes which had first become visible to him from the dusty vehicle that had borne the eclipsed family of Robertses to the baths, and which now again seemed to him, as they had done then, ten thousand times more enchanting than all the other eyes in the world put together.

Meanwhile the feelings of the Robertses were of a very mixed description. Poor Edward had become quite certain about the lord's being a lord, and knew not whether to be most provoked at having been seen in such a disgracefully uncoachmanlike scrape, or delighted at having the young nobleman brought into parley with his family. On the whole, perhaps, the latter feeling predominated. For, in the first place, it was not the young lord who had first perceived his blunder, and then officiously interfered to set it to rights, and therefore it was folly to be angry with him; so that at last he came to the conclusion that he would repay all the civility that had been shown them by a return of particularly polite

civility on his own part to the young lord ; while his angry feelings might find vent in giving a different sort of reception to the advances of the actual offender, who he was pretty sure was no lord at all ; first, because he had jumped off his horse so exactly like a common groom ; and next, because the real lord had not answered him a single word when he told him to meet him at the stables.

As to the two Miss Robertses, they were altogether in such a state of agitation, that it would have been very difficult for them to say themselves whether they were most teased or pleased by what had happened. Pleased they were, greatly beyond their powers of language to express, by the blessed chance which had brought Lord Lynberry to take off his hat beside their carriage—but teased, alas ! they were also, to a degree that none but a Miss Roberts could be, at the utter neglect into which their own charms had fallen, while his ill-judging, though noble eyes, had been fixed with such inconceivable pertinacity on the whitewashed face of that idiot Bertha ! Mrs. Roberts, indeed, with her usual superiority to the rest of her family, felt no doubt whatever about the matter. She knew that Lynberry must be Lord Lynberry, and was enchanted by the adventure ; she neither saw nor felt that its obvious advantages had any drawback ; and when Lord Lynberry, after uttering to Bertha all that it was well possible to say on the occasion, at length turned to her, and added, that he hoped he might be permitted to inquire to-morrow how they all were after their alarming accident, she, for the first time, felt her conscience perfectly at rest on the subject of the lodgings.

“What should I have suffered *now*,” thought she, “if I had taken a horrid, little, cheap lodging ! I should have been ready to sink into the earth !” And when, with her very best smile, she replied to his lordship’s civil speech, by saying, “Most happy ! the Balcony House, my lord,” the whole family felt a thrill of delight which overpowered every less agreeable sensation.

CHAPTER XXI.

WHILE the happy family pursued their way to the library, and occupied themselves there for a long half-hour, in saying and doing everything which they thought most likely to attract the admiring attention of the various loungers who went in and out, the young Lord Lynberry complied with the request of his tutor (for such was the office held by his companion), Mr. Vincent, and, riding to the livery-stables, found him remounted upon his runaway steed, and awaiting his arrival. The two young men then rode, as they had before intended, towards La Favorite, one of the Grand Duke’s pretty residences, and their chat as they went naturally fell upon their late adventure. “That’s the prettiest girl I have seen at Baden, Vincent,” said his lordship. “Which girl, my lord ? I

thought they were all pretty," was the reply. "You soulless monster!" exclaimed the young nobleman. "How is it possible you can class the angelic creature who has left an impression on my soul which nothing on this side heaven can ever efface—how is it possible you can class her with the sleek-looking, long-eared animals who were near her? Vincent, you are my tutor, but you must forgive the liberty I take—I despise you."

"If you will forgive my despicable qualities, I will forgive your superiority," replied Mr. Vincent; "so you really need not put the least restraint upon your feelings, though I am your tutor. But why do you say that the pretty creatures who were stationed near your divinity had long ears? This is slander, my lord, and I hold myself bound to reprehend you for it. I am quite sure that your lordship never saw even the tip of their ears, and I therefore consider this wanton attack upon the proportions of that unknown member, as equally ungenerous and unjust."

"How absolute the knave is! Do not the whole race of pretty young ladies look, every mother's daughter of them, like pretty puppy-dogs, with their long silken hair hanging down on each side of their soft eyes and unmeaning noses, precisely like the ornamental ears of those valued animals? What I call a beautiful girl is one who, on the very instant you first look at her, leaves you without power to decide whether she has ringlets or no ringlets, whether her eyes be black, blue, or brown—whether her nose be Greek, Roman, or Egyptian; or, in short, of anything concerning her, save that she is lovely. Such a one is this transcendent creature. *What* she is, to my cost, alas! I know only too well;—*who* she is, I must learn before to-night's ball; but I fear, I fear—" And his lordship sighed profoundly. "What, my gracious lord?" "That my Lord Southtown will not approve my choice," replied the young nobleman, with a second deep sigh. "Is it come to that already?" returned the tutor, laughing. "Nay, then, the fair creature has made quick work indeed. But why should you feel so suddenly assured of paternal opposition? Your father is exceedingly indulgent."

"Out on thee, thou blind guide! You did not see her then, I presume, entering the town last night, packed up amidst bales and boxes, in a dusty vetturino carriage, and looking like a diamond set in coal?"—"No, my dear Lynberry, I certainly did not."

Lord Lynberry turned half round in his saddle, with his right hand firmly resting on the back of his steed, and in this attitude took a deliberate survey of the person of his youthful tutor.

"William Harrington Vincent," said he, at length, "considering that you really are a very well-looking fellow, and, as I take it, not yet quite thirty years old, I consider you as an object little less worthy of curiosity than the Siamese Twins, or General Tom Thumb, or any other celebrated caprice of nature. How, in the

name of Heaven, did you contrive, last night, to pass within an ell of that angelic being, and remain unconscious of the fact? I cannot understand you—I cannot, upon my soul!”

After evincing considerable patience, and perhaps still more good nature, Mr. Vincent did at length get tired, very tired, of his companion's rhapsodies; and having listened in silence to a very prolix exposition of his firm determination never to marry any other woman than the young lady in black, who had so nearly been thrown into the ditch, he replied by saying,

“Do you know, Lynberry, I think this is a very dull road; what say you to a gallop back to the library, in order to examine the names of all the new arrivals? Who knows but we may find that of the future Countess of Southtown among them?”

The only reply to this was the sudden wheeling round of the young nobleman's horse, a movement immediately imitated by his companion, and then they both set off, *ventre à terre*, on their return to Baden. The bright suggestion of Mr. Vincent led to the wished-for result; the very last names inscribed among the subscribers to the library were those of Mr. Fitzherbert Roberts and family, and Miss Harrington, BALCONY HOUSE.

“These are the people, Vincent,” he exclaimed, laying his finger on the words Balcony House. “That is where the fat woman told me to call on them, and, by Heaven, my adorable is your namesake. How do we know that she may not be a cousin? Your name was Harrington before your father changed it for the estate that he has so magnanimously run through. How do we know that she is not your cousin, Vincent? Tell me, you well-born tutor you, tell me why she should not be your cousin? Not all the blood of all the Howards could make her in my eyes more noble than I think her already. But it might make matters easier, you know, with my father. Tell me, why should she not be your cousin?”

“I do not say she is not my cousin, Lynberry,” replied the tutor, endeavouring to look grave; “only I never happened to hear of such a cousin, as far as I can remember.”

“Remember? you remember nothing, Vincent, except a parcel of hateful old book-learning, that had better be forgotten. I have not the slightest doubt in the world that she is your cousin, and I shall take it very ill if you do not introduce yourself to her as a relation. Harrington is such a very uncommon name, and it is exceedingly improbable you should not be related.”

“I will make whatever inquiries you please, my dear friend,” replied Vincent; “only it is but right to inform you that if your conjecture prove true, my claiming acquaintance with her in consequence must be quite out of the question. I know of no female cousin but one, who is the daughter of a cousin-german of my

father's, which cousin-german of my father's is a very worthless middle-aged personage, who long ago quarrelled with my father, *à l'outrance*, and either of them would consider any intercourse with the family of the other a sin and a shame of the blackest dye. However, I suspect that no such obstacle exists to my making the acquaintance of the young lady, for, if I mistake not, the only child of our hostile cousin is still quite a little girl."

"At any rate, Vincent, there is some comfort to be found in the name of the people she is with. Fitzherbert is no obscure name, you must allow that."

This same unobscure name of FITZHERBERT had meanwhile produced, at the very least, as much satisfaction to the happy family on whom it had been so unexpectedly bestowed, as it could possibly do to the enamoured young viscount. The honour was first made known to them by the following address, firmly and distinctly written on a parcel containing some trifling purchases made by the young ladies in the universal magazine annexed to the circulating library :—

"Mrs. Fitzherbert Roberts, Balcony House, Baden-Baden."

As the handwriting was that of Edward, his mother and sisters naturally applied to him for the solution of this pleasant-looking mystery ; and none but a proud and devoted mother can possibly conceive the delightful feelings which swelled the bosom of Mrs. Roberts as she received the following answer :—

"Why, you did not suppose, did you, that I intended to go on everlastingly to the end of time with the name of Roberts, with nothing in nature to help it, except just what I could do myself in the way of setting it off? I know very well that I and the girls, between us, with a little of your help, mother, *may* in time do a good deal towards making it talked of. But leave me alone for giving matters a bit of a shove when I am in a hurry. I am up to a thing or two, ma'am, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Was there ever anything like him!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, tears of maternal pride actually filling her eyes as she spoke. "I don't believe there is such another from one end of Europe to the other! Doesn't it look well, and sound well, girls? The Fitzherbert Roberts! What could have put it into your dear clever head, Edward?"

"Why, hearing of the Montgomery Thompsons at Paris. It struck me at once that our name would sound just as well as theirs with this bit of a flourish to it. But you do not know all yet, mother. I could not set about it in Paris, you know, for there we had sung out Roberts and Roberts till it was impossible to change the tune ; but no sooner did I know for certain that we were going to make a regular fitting into altogether another quarter of the globe, than I went to a little engraver's shop, somewhere up in the

Marais, quite out of the way, and got these cards printed. Look ! are they not capital ?”

“Capital ! they are perfectly divine !” exclaimed Maria, seizing upon one of them, and pressing it in rapture to her lips. “Without any exception, Edward, it is the very cleverest thing I ever saw done in my life !”

Agatha, who had been listening to this explanation with very earnest attention, now took one of the cards in her hand, and read aloud,

MR. FITZHERBERT ROBERTS,

MRS. FITZHERBERT ROBERTS.

THE MISSES FITZHERBERT ROBERTS.

“Yes, Edward,” said she, “the thought certainly does you great credit—very great credit. In so young a man I do think it shows great talent—great knowledge of the world, which, after all, is the only sort of knowledge of any real use to human beings. People who live in the world must study the world, or they will fare very badly, you may depend upon it.”

“I wish your father could hear you, Agatha,” said Mrs Roberts ; “he has a great respect for your understanding, and if he could hear you express your opinion on this matter in the admirable way you have now done, I think it might be very useful, for I feel a good deal afraid of what he will say about it.”

“How can you, even in joke, mamma, pretend to say that you are afraid of my father ?” replied Agatha, with rather a contemptuous sneer. “For a woman of sense, as you are, who contrives to have everything so completely her own way, it is worse than silly to talk so.”

“By real talent, and constant good management, Agatha,” replied Mrs. Roberts, “I certainly do contrive, for the sake of my family, to have things a good deal my own way ; and heaven have mercy upon you, children, if this ever changes, for I know not what would become of you ! You would turn back again from butterflies into grubs, in double-quick time, I promise you. But though I *do* have my own way, Miss Agatha, in some things, there are others in which I cannot at all feel certain of it ; or, at any rate, not without having a monstrous deal of trouble ; and this clever thought of Edward’s about the name is just a case in point.”

“Leave the governor to me, ma’am,” said the young man, undauntedly. “I will undertake, somehow or other, to prevent his giving you any trouble about it. How does he know but that I may have discovered, in some of my hard reading and deep study in old books and records, that we are a branch of Robertses who had years and years ago a right to the name of Fitzherbert ? Or I might tell him, you know, that having left one or two trumpery little debts at Paris, which I shall pay when I marry Bertha, it will be quite as well to create a little puzzle about our identity. Somehow

or other, never mind how, I will bring him to reason, you may depend upon it."

There are some facts too obvious for an historian to mention ; such, for instance, as the absence of Miss Harrington during the foregoing conversation, she being at that time taking her first solitary ramble ; as likewise the determination of going to the *soirée dansante* to which the Fitzherbert Robertses had all arrived within half a second of learning that such an assembly was to take place. Such things are too self-evident to need pointing out ; and therefore, without being guilty of any important omission, our travellers may be at once displayed in the enjoyment of a crowded ball at Baden. When their intention of going there had been first mentioned to Bertha, she had said that she should prefer staying at home ; but when Mrs. Roberts, taking her apart, besought her as a very great favour to go, urging moreover the certainty of her making herself more remarkable than was quite right, by withdrawing herself from the habits and manners of the family with whom her aunt had thought proper to place her, she yielded, and entered the crowded ball-room with them accordingly.

That ball-room at Baden-Baden, with its decorative shrubs and flowers, and its varied specimens of pretty women from all quarters of the civilized world, is a brilliant spectacle ; and to Bertha it was moreover something so perfectly new, that she involuntarily stood still within three steps of the threshold, that she might look about her. The Roberts family were greatly shocked. "For Heaven's sake, Bertha !" exclaimed Agatha, "do not look so horribly new ! People will think that you never were in a ball-room before in your life." "I never was," replied Bertha, blushing very beautifully, and hastening onward.

But before they had advanced three paces further, the elegant *nonchalance* of the Miss Robertses was severely tried by perceiving Lord Lynberry in the centre of one of the most striking groups in the room, apparently regaling them by the relation of some comical anecdote, for the whole party were listening to him with the air of being much amused. As they passed this party, Miss Agatha Roberts happened to drop her fan ; and the little bustle which ensued before she could recover it from under the feet of one of Lord Lynberry's party, caused his lordship to turn round. Few triumphs have ever been more keenly enjoyed than that which, for a moment at least, flashed from the eyes of Mrs. and the Miss Robertses, upon seeing the gay young nobleman suddenly quit the party who were so attentively listening to him, and approach to pay his compliments to them. A complacent simper upon the fat face of a plump, well-pleased, hope-inspired mother, is too common a sight under such circumstances to attract any attention at all ; and, fortunately for the high pretensions of the Roberts race, its pretty daughters had learned, amongst other *minauderies*, to receive the salutations of

all the gentlemen whom they particularly wished to attract, with no demonstrations of delight more obvious to the ordinary looker-on than a little nod of the head ; for as to latent smiles, bouquet-sheltered blushes, and any of the thousand-and-one varieties of eye-beams which may lie in ambush under this cold *aboard*, nobody whatever but the parties principally concerned can possibly know anything about it. So the Miss Robertses stood the approach of Lord Lynberry admirably ; and when he twisted himself in and out as he made civil speeches to the whole party, till he had reached the side of Bertha, and was then heard, by ears too much on the alert to lose anything, to ask for the honour of her hand in the next dance, nothing like emotion of any kind was discernible beyond what might be expressed by the simultaneous and somewhat ardent sniff which they each gave to their bouquets. But Lord Lynberry understood the business of the ball-room quite as well as the Miss Robertses, and by no means intended that the newly elected idol of his affections should be exposed to any of the disagreeable adventures which are apt to arise from close companionship with disappointed beauties ; and he therefore, with a quiet celerity that did infinite honour to his *savoir-vivre*, murmured in the ear of Bertha, "Excuse me for a moment," then plunged into the crowd, and speedily emerged from it again, leading captive the young Irish nobleman, whose sonorous name of Lord Clanballygough had already reached the ears of the Roberts family, and also a small and rather premature baronet, called Sir Simpson Saunders. These two highly eligible partners were, as quick as thought, engaged to dance with the two Miss Robertses, which may suffice to explain the words whispered by Agatha to her mother, when she placed her fan and her embroidered pocket-handkerchief in the maternal hand, "A tolerably successful *début*. Both titles !"

CHAPTER XXII.

THIS first ball at the Baden rooms proved almost as important to some of the parties present as the most ardent-minded among them could have anticipated ; for impressions were made, and, what was more important still, purposes were decided on, which really did "*influence the future destiny*" of more than one of the persons present at it. This last result, at least, is found to ensue upon such occasions less frequently than is predicated by the majority of youthful males and females, while arming themselves for the gay arena in which eyes are to do battle with eyes, and hearts are to be lost and won. In the first place, the young Lord Lynberry left the brilliant scene altogether a different man from what he was when he approached it ; for then he had only felt, as he had often done before, that he was about to meet the very loveliest creature that ever existed—one for whose dear sake he had already spent hours in scrawling upon every scrap of

paper that came in his way, "Bertha, Viscountess Lynberry," and sometimes, "Bertha, Countess Southtown;" but ere he quitted it, his feelings had undergone a most surprising revolution. And Bertha, too, had changed her mind about many matters. But of this anon. Some details of this important evening's adventures must perforce be given, in order to make the subsequent pages intelligible; but it shall be done with all possible brevity, for nothing is more beguiling to the compilers of such chronicles as the present, than the having to relate the petty adventures of an important ball; page after page runs from under the too faithful pen, till a whole chapter is found all too short to contain them.

The dance over, from which the young ladies of our travelling party were so happily provided with partners in the last chapter, the following changes took place before the next began. Lord Lynberry, though still steadfastly determined that Bertha Harrington should be converted into Lady Lynberry as soon as he could possibly arrange the necessary preliminaries, was nevertheless rather disagreeably awakened to the conviction, that as yet she was not so distractedly in love with him as it was natural to expect she should be. The reason for this, however, was, he thought, obvious. He found that as yet they had no subjects of conversation equally interesting to both. This of course would be remedied as soon as he should begin to speak to her openly of the unchangeable passion she had inspired, and of the delightful plans for future happiness which were opened before them both in consequence. But at present he was quite conscious that nothing which he had been able to think of in the way of amusing conversation had been in the least degree successful. It was so evident, from the very first moment that they stood up together, that she was extremely embarrassed as to where she was to take her place, when she ought to begin, and so forth, that he began to suspect, what the first volunteer speech she addressed to him avowed, namely, that this was the first ball at which she had appeared; and this enabled him to account for her cold manner and persevering silence, without very deeply wounding his vanity; so he gently pressed her hand, as he placed her beside her bulky *chaperon*, and threw a vast deal of tenderness into his eyes, as he expressed his hope that this was not the last dance they were to enjoy together that evening. In reply to this speech, look, and action, Miss Harrington for the first time raised her beautiful eyes to his, and for the space of about half a moment she really seemed occupied in endeavouring to discover what he meant; but he moved on, sighing as he went, because he had not found her youthful intellect in as great a state of perfection as her youthful beauty, but determined to cultivate as much general intimacy with her party as he could, in order to facilitate his scheme for performing the Promethean process, and awakening her to life. With this view,

he immediately asked the first Miss Roberts within his reach to favour him with her hand for the next dance. This fortunate first found was Miss Maria ; and to describe her sensations on the occasion must be needless. The equally happy Agatha was almost at the same propitious moment introduced by her first partner to a second ; and although this second partner was not blessed with a title, his peculiarly handsome person, his fashionable air, and the bewitching name of Montgomery, fully atoned for the deficiency.

Bertha meanwhile, though really half concealed by some of the eighteen breadths of majestic silk which spread themselves on either side of Mrs. Roberts, was not so totally overlooked but that she too got a partner. The ceremonies of introduction at the Brunnen are often as slight as their other bubbles ; so that even those who under other circumstances might not be classed among the Captain Easys of the age, make no great scruple of seizing upon somewhat slight accidents for commencing a wished-for acquaintance. Mr. Vincent, the young tutor of Lord Lynberry, either to please himself or his pupil, availed himself upon the present occasion of the accident of the preceding day, as an excuse for addressing Mrs. Roberts and the young lady by her side ; and after hoping that they had experienced no ill effects from their alarm, he ventured to ask Bertha to dance with him.

Although the statement which he had made to his pupil respecting his reasons for not believing that Miss Harrington was his cousin was perfectly correct, the idea that it was just possible she might be so, had afterwards suggested itself : he remembered that little girls do grow very suddenly into young women, and he remembered also that if that pretty creature were really the daughter of his father's hostile cousin, she would be no more likely to feel wrathfully disposed towards him than he did towards her ; and having thus argued himself into courage for the enterprise, he led her out to dance, determined to ascertain, before he led her back again, whether she were in truth related to him or not.

That woman is a capricious animal, has been too often asserted, and received as true, for any prudent person to venture upon denial of so generally recognized a statement ; and perhaps it was only because the statement is true, that Bertha, though so "earthly dull" and obstinately stupid a partner while dancing with Lord Lynberry, appeared, as completely as a quiet-mannered girl could do, the reverse while dancing with his tutor. She was never a very loquacious person, but now she was by no means a silent one, and, between every *tour de valse*, rather a longer time than ordinary was lost from the exercise, by the inclination which both her partner and herself testified for conversation.

When the music ceased, Mr. Vincent, as he offered his arm, suggested that Mrs. Roberts was seated in a part of the room where there was too much draught to make a place near her safe immediately after dancing.

"Let me recommend you to sit down here, at least for a few minutes," he added; "Miss Roberts and Mr. Montgomery have had the prudence to select this side of the room, I perceive."

Bertha made no objection to the proposal, nor would she have done so had he assigned no reason whatever for selecting this place in preference to the one occupied by Mrs. Roberts. Her entire ignorance of all the minor etiquettes of society prevented her from feeling it in any degree desirable that she should approach any one whom, in her innocent heart, she particularly wished to avoid; and she seated herself in the snug corner pointed out by her agreeable partner, with such an innocent air of satisfaction and approval, that perhaps there was not another man in the room, besides that partner, who would not have felt disposed to smile as he watched it. Mr. Vincent, on the contrary, began to look more than usually grave as he placed himself beside her; but the thoughtful expression of countenance, which now succeeded to the gayer aspect which he had before worn, was not produced either by his approval or disapproval of her manner towards him, but by the fact that he really had something serious to say to her.

"I am half afraid, Miss Harrington," he began, "to say to you what, nevertheless, I am quite determined that I will say, *coûte que coûte*; which is being more bold than gallant, for I confess I think it very likely that what I am about to utter may prevent my ever having the pleasure of dancing with you again."

"Indeed!" replied Bertha, with a smile, which had some sort of meaning in it which he could not understand. He looked at her earnestly for a moment, and then replied, "Yes, *indeed*."

"Well then, begin, Mr. William Harrington Vincent," returned Bertha, "your communication must, I suppose, be something very terrible, but I will bear it as well as I can."

"Will you, Bertha Elizabeth Harrington?" he said in reply, while a smile of very evident satisfaction lit up his handsome features. "Is it possible that you should have been born and reared at Castle Harrington, without having been taught to shudder at the name of Vincent?"

It was in an accent from which all mirth had fled that Bertha answered, "I was born and reared at Castle Harrington, but it was by my mother."

"And you have lost her, my poor cousin?" returned the young man, glancing at her dress, and then at the pale fair face which interpreted with such painful eloquence the cause for which she wore it. It was by tears, despite her utmost efforts to restrain them, that Bertha replied to this question; and Vincent, waiting for no other answer, explained, in a tone of most genuine and not-to-be-mistaken sympathy, the various causes which had conspired to prevent his having heard of her loss. "Not only have I been travelling during the last year," he continued, "in so desultory a style as to render all regular communication of intelligence from

home impossible; my good-natured pupil having *carte blanche* in this respect from his over-indulgent father; but however gentle your lamented mother's feelings may have been towards the unfortunate inhabitants of Everton Park, the master of that luckless mansion has for years past avoided the naming Harrington Castle, and everything connected with it, as if the doing so could bring him face to face with the relation who, though now, I believe, the only one he has left in the world, appears to be the object of his most unmitigated hatred. But I know there was a time, dearest Bertha, when our poor mothers loved each other; and it is to the remembrances left by this kind feeling in the heart of Lady Harrington, that I owe the gentle reception which you have given to your forbidden cousin; for that I do 'live a man forbid' in the estimation of your father, I cannot doubt."

"Your name, at least," replied Bertha, "is with him a name forbid, for I never heard it, save from my dear mother; but from her very, oh! very often. Perhaps you were too young to remember it, but before my unhappy mother married, she was staying on a visit of many months with yours, and it was there indeed she met—" Bertha stopped. It seemed to her at that moment as if her lips had not the power of pronouncing the word "father;" again the rebellious tears rushed to her eyes, and suddenly conscious of the many looks that might be directed towards her, she exclaimed, "May I not go home?"

Mr. Vincent rose, and standing before her so as almost to prevent her being seen, he said, "Nothing would draw upon you so much attention as attempting to leave the room at this moment, my dear cousin. You are not, I am quite certain, one of those who are apt to give way to every emotion. Sit quietly for a minute or two, dear Bertha, and you will recover yourself. Oh no," he resumed, perceiving that his remonstrance was not lost on his young relative; "oh no, I was not only old enough at the time you mention to enable me to remember your mother, but I was old enough to love her dearly; and it was the remembrance of this feeling, and of all the sweet gentle kindness which produced it, that determined me to brave a possible rebuff from the daughter of Sir Christopher Harrington, for the chance that I might find the daughter like her mother."

"You were ever and always remembered by her with tender affection," replied Bertha, almost smiling at him, though something very like a sob accompanied her words, "and that was the reason why I was determined, when you asked me to dance, that I would really make acquaintance with you, and make you find out who I was. I found you out because the young gentleman, your pupil, asked me whether my family were related to the Harrington Vincents of Everton Park, adding that his tutor was the son of Mr. Harrington Vincent; and then I remembered all the thousand things I had heard about you and your mother from my own dear

mamma:"—and once again the face of poor Bertha became utterly unfit for a ball-room. Mr. Vincent, who the moment before had been thinking he might venture to resume his place beside her, now seemed to think it best that he should continue standing, and he did so; but it was very gaily, notwithstanding her falling tears, that he repeated the words, "Young gentleman!"

"The young gentleman, my pupil," he added, laughing, "is at this moment exceedingly in love with Miss Bertha Harrington; but worthy as that young lady is of inspiring such a passion, I own I greatly doubt whether the constancy of Lord Lynberry could stand such a phrase as that! The young gentleman! Why, my dear little cousin, what would you call him if he were still at Eton?"

"I should call him as I do now," replied Bertha, laughing at the reproachful look and accent which accompanied the question; "and though he is your pupil, cousin William," she added, using the appellation which her mother had made familiar to her, "I not only think that he looks like a school-boy, but rather a silly one."

This opinion was gaily combated, and by degrees the young tutor had the pleasure of perceiving that his lovely cousin was again fit to be seen.

"What a vulgar-minded girl Bertha Harrington must be!" said Maria Roberts to her sister Agatha, as they both stood up again to dance a quadrille. "Lord Lynberry thinks her exceedingly handsome, he says, but he declares that she is so shy, it is the most difficult thing in the world to make her speak. But just look at her now. She was too shy, awkward creature! to say a word to Lord Lynberry, but she can flirt fast enough with his tutor."

"It is the natural effect of her having been brought up in an out-of-the-way country-place," replied Agatha. "Bertha Harrington has not the slightest notion, in any way, of fashionable life and manners. But as to her preferring that handsome Vincent to his pupil, I think something might be said in her excuse, though I doubt if she would have *savoir-vivre* enough to find it out. Lynberry is such a mere boy!" But at this moment Mr. Montgomery drew near, and the whole person of the fair Agatha, even to the very skirts of her clothing, seemed to feel the influence of his approach. Maria, however, was not in a state of mind to notice her sister's emotion, for the manner in which the name of Lord Lynberry had been mentioned, had in it something too offensive to be borne. And she turned from the rash speaker with feelings of mingled contempt and anger, stronger than she would have wished to express before any third person. "I know it is only mortification and envy, because he did not ask her to dance," she murmured to herself as she walked away. "Poor Agatha! it is folly to feel angry with her. It is all very natural, poor thing! But oh! she knows not what she has lost! No! nor she never can! Lynberry will never show himself for what he really is save

to the happy being whom his taste selects as a partner, either for a dance or for life ! But to such he is like a creature inspired ! The die is cast !” she added, in secret confusion, and with a secret sigh. “ This night is the crisis of my destiny—and either misery that might draw pity from a stone, or bliss that the gods might envy, must be my portion !”

As to the young Lord Lynberry himself, he was much less able to describe the state of his own feelings when he left the ball-room than when he entered it. He had not said a syllable, in his conversation with Vincent, upon the subject of his passion for Miss Harrington, which he did not believe to be strictly true ; and, to a certain degree, it was so—that is to say, he did really and truly intend to marry her at the first possible opportunity. But concerning the immortal nature of his passion, he made a little mistake ; for whatever might have been its perennial constancy, had the young lady looked at him with the same sort of look that Miss Maria did, her cold glance, and the effect produced by the evident fact that, although Bertha did not catch the meaning of above one word in three of all he had said to her, whilst her rival *felt* each syllable he spoke almost before it had fully passed his lips, shook its durability to the very centre ; and it is certain that he not only suffered Mr. Vincent to hand his newly-found cousin into the carriage, but when he performed the same office to the fair Maria, he squeezed her hand so decidedly, as effectually to prevent her obtaining a single moment’s sleep till past three o’clock in the morning.

But perhaps the most extraordinary change of all was that produced upon the intellectual portion of Mr. Edward Roberts. In his case it was not the heart, but the head, which had undergone this process. He had entered the room as firmly determined to marry Bertha Harrington as even Lord Lynberry himself ; but, unlike his lordship, he had left it without having this determination in the least degree shaken. The change consisted in the new-born resolution of setting about the necessary preliminaries immediately. He had heard her called “ beautiful ” by every man he had spoken to during the evening ; “ lovely ” by two of the lords who adorned the assembly, and “ angelic ” by the third—and Edward Roberts felt that he must trifle no longer.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE first fruits of this “ most delightful ball ” to the Roberts family were morning visits from several of their partners, all of whom had somehow or other contrived to get what was held by all the parties concerned as a sufficient introduction to justify their doing so. Is it necessary to describe how energetically beautiful the two Miss Robertses became, as these enchanting consequences

of their last night's success developed themselves? Is it necessary to say, that the view from one window offered something indescribably fascinating to Agatha and Mr. Montgomery? Or that the other had something to show which made Maria, and perhaps Lord Lynberry too, forget that she was standing instead of sitting; and moreover, that she had been turning her back for a most unmercifully long time upon the rest of the company? As to Bertha, she was rambling abroad, so that she neither made nor marred the pleasure of anybody. Mr. Vincent was among the visitors; he did not, however, stay long, but his absence was scarcely remarked, for before he went there were no less than four of the most "fashionable" men at the baths, shedding light through the atmosphere of Mrs. Roberts's drawing-room. When the whole of this bright constellation had become visible, the two young ladies felt that the hour for *tête-à-tête* indulgence of more tender sentiments was, for the time, over; and each, nearly at the same moment, returning from her window, took possession of a *bergère*, and adorned the circle with eloquence to which eyes, ringlets, hands, feet, pocket-handkerchiefs, eye-glasses, and smelling-bottles, all contributed, as well as the rosy lips which gave forth in addition sweet glimpses of the intellectual treasures within. Perhaps at that moment it would have been impossible to find, over the entire surface of the globe called Earth, two happier young ladies. Yet perhaps even their high-wrought felicity did not exceed that of their triumphant mother. Who was it that had brought them there? Who was it had taken a Balcony House to put them in, with elegant arm-chairs made on purpose to show off fine girls who knew how to make the best of themselves? What would they have been, in comparison, without those lovely silk morning dresses, which set off their shapes so divinely? Yes, it was a triumph to remember how she had gone on, and on, and on, in defiance of danger and difficulty, till she had brought them to such a state as this! And then to see Edward enter, looking fifty times handsomer than either of the *fourfirst-rates* who graced her drawing-room! She was a happy mother, and she felt it in every fibre, as she sat a little apart, testifying her measureless content by a constantly renewed smile, and a sort of purring sound, which she emitted every time either of the gentlemen said anything loud enough for her to hear; and which, while it plainly indicated her admiration, had little or no tendency to draw upon herself the invaluable eloquence which, with all a mother's fond devotion, she delighted to yield, unshared, to the eagerly devouring ears of her children. But great as was the enjoyment of this seemingly idle hour to the daughters and the son of Mrs. Roberts, they suffered it not to pass by them "*unimproved*"—that is to say, they took care to make the most of it in the way of a wedge, to open the way to future intercourse and closer intimacy with their new friends.

"*A propos*," said the lively Edward, after hearing Mr. Mont-

gomery declare that he had seen prettier English women at Baden than at all the other places he had visited since he left London,—“A propos, where do you mean to dine, ma'am?”

“Dine? my dear boy, why at home, to be sure,” replied his smiling mother, to whom his question had been addressed.

Edward replied with a gay laugh, and winking at the same time to Mr. Montgomery, “All dining out, my good lady, does not depend upon receiving invitations. My question was put for the purpose of learning whether you intended to patronize a *table d'hôte*, or dine *à la carte*. I did not suspect you of plotting such treason against us as proposing to dine at home.”

Mrs. Roberts coloured violently, and was, to say truth, exceedingly embarrassed by her doubts as to what she ought to reply. And there certainly was great difficulty in the question. Had it entered her head to say to Lord Lynberry (who was *the great man par excellence*), “Which should your lordship advise?” the matter would have been immediately settled in the most agreeable manner possible; but this was not her way, and therefore, after betraying sufficient embarrassment to keep her young visitors from volunteering any opinion on the subject, she replied, “Upon my word, my dear, I don't know. We must think about it.”

The delicate feelings of her son were so painfully wounded by this reply, which he was quite certain would suggest suspicions of the most vulgar economy to his invaluable new friend, that, thoughtless of the consequences to his equally distressed sisters, he started up, saying to the gentlemen, *en masse*, “Let us go and look at the tables—shall we?”

The proposal was one of those which could scarcely be negatived without assigning a reason, and neither of the gentlemen in the present state of affairs chose to say that they had rather remain where they were; so they all rose as by one common impulse, and in two short minutes the room which had been the very gayest in all Baden, became one of the most melancholy in the whole world. For the space of two more minutes, now most sadly long, silence unbroken followed the closing of the drawing-room door. For which of the metamorphosed three who were left within it, could have braved the danger of being overheard, as the first burst of feeling rushed from her lips? But this interval over, and the retreating figures of the five young men become visible on the broad road which led to the rooms, all their three voices became audible at once. “Idiot!” “Abominable!” “I never will forgive him,” were the first words that could be distinguished; and then for a moment the tongue of the mother gained the ascendant, as she said, in a voice of mingled rage and mortification, “What on earth could he mean by asking me such an absurd question?”

“Oh! as to that, ma'am, the absurdity was entirely your own,” replied Agatha, whose mind, becoming every hour more fully developed, was rapidly breaking down the inconvenient restraints

of filial deference. "Nobody in the world but yourself would have given such an answer as you did. I am sure I don't know, as yet—how should I, or how should you either?—whether it is *bon-ton* or *mauvais* to dine at a Baden *table d'hôte*. But you might have given Edward credit for having *some* motive for what he said. And it was downright madness, as well as barbarity, to set him down in the manner you did."

"Mamma was wrong, there is no doubt about that," said Maria. "But that is no excuse for Edward, no, not the least in the world, Agatha—and I never *will* forgive him."

"Yes, Maria, Edward was excessively to blame," said Agatha, "there *is* no doubt about it; and, if I am not greatly mistaken, you and I are not the only ones who would have liked to box his ears for it. But that makes no difference as to the excessive folly of my mother's answer to him."

"Upon my word, Miss Agatha," returned Mrs. Roberts, rousing the courage which never was in such danger of quailing as when her eldest daughter ran a tilt at her, "I do think it would be as well if you weighed your words before you uttered them. You confess that *you* don't know whether it is genteel or vulgar to dine at a *table d'hôte*, and how should *I* know? Now just suppose that it is the vulgarest thing possible—which I suspect it is—how should you have liked to have heard me say in reply to Edward's silly point-blank question, '*We will dine at a table d'hôte, my dear?*'"

"You need not have given a point-blank answer because he asked a point-blank question," replied Agatha. "You must know, ma'am, or at least I am sure you ought to know, that it does not signify a straw where we dine. A single moment's consideration would have made you aware that Edward meant by what he said, to open some sort of discussion, with those excessively pleasant people that you have so driven away, upon the subject of dining together. And did not those hateful words of yours, '*we must think about it,*' say as plainly as any words could do, that *they* were to know nothing about the matter, nor in any way to have anything to do with us?"

"Good gracious! no, Agatha," replied Mrs. Roberts, but in a tone greatly softened by the glimpse her daughter's words afforded her of the mischief she had really done. "Heaven is my witness," she continued, "that I would have put my hand in the fire, rather than have done or said anything that might check what was going on so beautifully." And here poor Mrs. Roberts actually drew forth her pocket-handkerchief and wiped her eyes. "And do you think," she resumed, "that it is no pleasure to me to see how that charming young man, the Right Honourable Lord Lynberry, has thrown Miss Bertha overboard, and devoted himself heart and soul to Maria? Do you think I don't feel it, and glory in it?" And the good lady sobbed from the vehemence her mixed emotions.

The heart of Maria was softened. "It is no good to fret about it now, mamma," said she, forgivingly, "and, unless my heart deceives me, Lynberry will give you many opportunities of atoning for the error you have committed. It is not one word which will send him off, I think."

"I hope so," replied Agatha, in a tone that gave great weight and authority to her opinion; "and I hope, and I believe also, that the same may be said of Mr. Montgomery, who, in my humble opinion, is worth all the lords in the peerage, ten times over. But nevertheless, ma'am, we must not trust everything to the strength of their sentiments in our favour. It would be only preparing heartaches for ourselves, were we to forget that men so exquisitely fascinating as Montgomery, and so distinguished as Lord Lynberry, are sure to be surrounded by all that is most lovely and attractive, let them go where they will; and it is not very likely they will endure to be treated with rudeness, or even with coldness, by those to whom they pay such flattering attention as they have done to us."

"Rudeness! coldness!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, clasping her hands in an agony; "as if I was likely to treat them with rudeness or coldness! Upon my word, Agatha, you will drive me wild if you talk so. What may happen next, Heaven knows. Edward may come down on me with some other puzzling question, and for what I know I may answer it in a way to make his lordship, and your elegant Mr. Montgomery, order post-horses, and set off to the world's end. In common ordinary concerns, I am not afraid to say that I would trust my judgment, and my management too, against those of any woman in Christendom; but it is no good to deny that all this business about noblemen, and *table d'hotes*, and *diners sur la carte*, and all the rest of it, is too much for me. I shall soon get into the way of it all, and quicker perhaps than most other people would do; but just now, upon my word and honour, girls, you must tell me exactly what I am to say, and what I am to do."

"Nothing can be more fair, ma'am," said Agatha, promptly, and not a little pleased at perceiving that the struggle in which she had been for some time engaged with her honoured mother for supremacy was likely to terminate so favourably. "I am the last person in the world who would wish to blame any one for not understanding what they know nothing about. All I would ask of you, all we would any of us ask of you, is not to put any obstacles in the way of anything being done, that you may see us anxious to do. We may not be able to explain it all to you at the moment, but you may depend upon it, ma'am, we shall take care to make you understand it afterwards, and *then* you will always find we have been right. The business of this morning has certainly been most unfortunate; but let us hope that it will not prove fatal. I have little doubt that Edward, when he is cool enough to reflect, will be aware that, however wrong you were, he was at least equally so, for

giving way to a burst of temper in a manner which threatened the destruction of all we most value; and then we may be sure he will endeavour to undo the mischief he has done."

"Heaven grant he may succeed!" said Maria, with a deep sigh; "but it may be more easy to wish than to perform."

"I don't know that," returned Agatha, with cheering confidence. "Where two or more parties have got to act together, and all are desirous of coming to the same result, the chances are in favour of their succeeding."

"But how do we know, Agatha, that these first-rate young men may not have something else in their heads, that they may like quite as well as dining with us?" said Mrs. Roberts, with an air of considerable sagacity.

"That is very true, ma'am," replied Agatha, exchanging a slight smile with her sister; "we can only guess. However, you know it is quite as well to be prepared for whatever may happen. What I should propose is this. The carriage will be here almost immediately; it came when our friends were sitting with us, but I gave Edward his cue, and he ran downstairs and ordered it to go away and return in two hours; when it comes, we must divide, ma'am. Either you or I must drive to the rooms, the library, you know, and all other places, and the other must stay at home. It is possible that Edward may come back here again, in the hope of settling something pleasant about dinner, and if he does, what we have to do is only to agree to it, for you may be perfectly sure that he knows what we wish for—perfectly. And if he and his friends are encountered at the rooms, the same thing must be done. I do not care a farthing whether I go or stay; you may take your choice, ma'am; but only take care that you really understand what you are going to do."

"I understand perfectly, Agatha," replied Mrs. Roberts, feeling a little restive, perhaps, at being thus suddenly reduced to passive obedience; "but there is one point upon which I suspect you have not yet turned your attention. This dining in company with these gay young gentlemen, my dear, will cost more, perhaps, than your papa may be inclined to pay; not to mention, young ladies, that he cannot be left out of the party, just as if he was dead and buried. I am sure I am not inclined to make too much fuss about him, but there is reason in everything, Agatha."

"And pray, ma'am, who but yourself has ever said a word about my father's being left out of the party? I am sure that neither Maria nor I ever had such an idea. And as to the expense, ma'am, I really believe that this is the first time since travelling was invented, that a *table d'hôte* was supposed to be an expensive mode of dining. It is, on the contrary, so notoriously cheap, that in a general way it is considered, I know, as rather a vulgar thing to do. But such a party, you know, would reconcile one to everything. However, you may very safely tell papa that you think it

right to make the experiment before you begin ordering dinners at home, thinking it very likely, you may say, from what you have been told, that a *table d'hôte* is the very cheapest way of dining in the world."

"And now you mention it, Agatha," replied her mother, "I perfectly well remember that I *have* heard so, and into the bargain, I am sure I have heard also that it was very vulgar too, my dear; and I own I should be rather afraid that we might lose a little in the estimation of his lordship by being seen at such an inferior place."

"Trust to me upon that point, mamma, I beg of you," said Agatha. "Were they to meet us there by accident, I won't deny that it might be so; but when young people particularly wish to be together, they do not reckon anything vulgar which enables them to gratify that wish. Besides, you know, it is exceedingly easy to let them see by our manner and conversation that we are not used to it, and they will only be the more gratified by our going there to meet them—that feeling of course must be reciprocal."

"Yes, to be sure, that is quite true. And here comes the carriage, Agatha. It is you, my dear, that must stay at home, because I must chaperon your sister. I wonder where that poor silly creature, Bertha, is wandering? If she comes in, Agatha, take care to be civil to her. God knows what would become of us, launching out as we do every day more and more, if she were to take it into her head to go away from us!" said Mrs. Roberts, with a groan.

"It will be easy enough to prevent that, ma'am, I should think, if we choose it," muttered Agatha.

"I don't know, my dear, I am sure," replied her mother, hastening away to equip herself for her drive; "young girls are very headstrong sometimes."

CHAPTER XXIV.

CONSIDERABLY before four o'clock, which at the time I am writing of was the hour fixed for the most approved *table d'hôte* at Baden-Baden, the Roberts family had succeeded in making an appointment with Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery to join their party there at that hour. Never, perhaps, even for the very finest ball that their Parisian good fortune had bestowed upon them, had their toilets been matter of such anxious care to the two young ladies as they were upon this occasion. Detail upon such a subject must ever be idle and superfluous. Let the imagination of every reader suggest the probable result of the Miss Robertses' efforts to look the perfection of elegance, in dresses which they could not venture to make perfectly *décolletés*, but which, for a multitude of reasons, they could not endure should be absolutely the reverse. The two sisters took different means for obtaining the object they had in view, and which succeeded best it would be difficult to say. Agatha did

l'impossible to render a morning dress almost as fascinating as an evening one could have been ; while Maria's ingenuity exerted itself in the construction of a fanciful preparation of transparent gauze, which she flattered herself produced the bewitching effect of the demi-toilette of a Frenchwoman, without losing much of the less shyly displayed attractions of English full-dress. Both sisters were conscious that they had been eminently successful, and the pretty faces of both wore that smiling look of inward satisfaction which marks a high-toned mental preparation for enjoyment. As to Bertha Harrington, they could not at such a moment consider her of sufficient importance to occupy any part of their attention, or they might have been aware that they had never before seen her look so beautiful, or appear so happy.

And now, kind reader, awaken your imagination, and behold the party. The open carriage, decorated with the blue shawl and the black mantle, conveyed the four ladies, attended by the good-natured Mr. Roberts on the box, to the widely opened doors of the gay-looking hotel at which the favourite *table d'hôte* of the baths was to be found. Before these open doors, grouping themselves with a fine oleander tree on one side, and a splendid pomegranate on the other, stood the young Lord Lynberry, the handsome Montgomery, and the brilliant Mr. Edward Roberts.

There was at first some slight shadow of doubt among the Roberts party, as to how the gentlemen and ladies were to arrange themselves to make their *entrée*. For a moment the tender Maria felt literally sick at heart, as she remembered the eager attentions of Lord Lynberry to Miss Harrington during the first part of the preceding evening. Should he begin in the same manner now, she was lost ; for at dinner there was no changing of partners, and as things began so they must go on. Nor were her terrors by any means unfounded. Lord Lynberry had by no means forgotten that he had fallen vehemently in love with Bertha Harrington, neither had he in any degree changed his opinion as to the fact that she was ten thousand times over the handsomest girl at the baths ; and therefore when the Roberts equipage first stopped, his eye had decidedly sought her out from amidst the charming group it contained. He sought and he found her. But where was the sympathy he looked for in the eyes of Bertha ? There they were indeed, those matchless eyes, neither veiled by their own dark lashes, nor hid from him by any other obstruction whatever ; but wide open, radiant in youth and joy, tempered only by that soft expression of heartfelt happiness which rather melts into dew than blazes into light. But alas ! they were not turned upon him ! No ! they were intently fixed upon the towering mountain amidst whose forests she had been wandering with such deep delight ; and at the instant the carriage stopped she had just decided in her own wilful young mind, that she would set out still earlier on the following day than she had done on this, and devote the whole long

morning to prowling about the old ruin. Why might she not hope, by courage and perseverance, to discover the secret passage between the upper castle and the lower one — a passage so confidently stated to exist by all the volumes she had consulted on the subject, and leading to that most mysterious spot on earth, the *oubliette* of the secret tribunal?

With such thoughts working in her young head, she cared no more for all the young lords in creation than if they had been so many butterflies; and when at length she condescended to accept an offered hand, and descend from the pleasant elevation which had given her so good a view of her dear Alt Schloss, this indifference looked out from her admired eyes with so much eloquent sincerity, that the noble young lover, who had so recently vowed to marry her in defiance of the whole world, became cured of his passion as suddenly as if a strong dose of Puck's distillation from the "little purple flower" had been administered to his eyelids. In truth, the Lord Lynberry, though a very good-natured sort of young man, was not of a character to endure such a look as that, unchanged. He was exceedingly inflammable—not choleric, but amatory; and moreover, he was, to say truth, prodigiously vain; and both these propensities together made the falling in love and being *adored* in return, the favourite occupation of his life. As yet this occupation had caused him incomparably more pleasure than pain; nor was it very likely that it should soon be otherwise; for his propensity to falling in love, and his persuasion that he must be fallen in love with in return, were so well balanced, that it was scarcely possible for either to obtain an inconvenient preponderance. A proof of this was most pleasantly offered on the present occasion. His young lordship had begun the Baden-Baden season by falling in love with Bertha Harrington, and by being fallen in love with by Maria Roberts. In most cases such an untoward mismatching of tender passion might have led to much vexation. But the happy temperament of Lord Lynberry most fortunately prevented this. At the very moment that his ardent glance and animated salutation to Miss Harrington were answered by a look so vacant and unmeaning as to leave him doubtful whether she remembered his person or his name, a sudden and eager movement brought the pretty face of Maria Roberts full before his eyes; and before he had quite determined whether to resent or deprecate the cruel indifference of Bertha, the question was settled for him, and his tender heart once more pierced through and through, by such a glance from the expressive eyes of Maria, as could leave no doubt on such a mind as his, that *she* at least loved him as he deserved to be loved.

No juggling conjuration that ever was performed could have produced a more sudden and complete change than did this eloquent glance. Disappointment melted before it; new hopes were hatched as in a hotbed; and his freshly enamoured young lord-

ship sprang forward, presented his arm to the fluttered and pattered fair one, to whom he had determined to devote himself for the rest of the day, and perhaps for the rest of his life, and led the way into the spacious room where the *table d'hôte* was prepared. His selection of a partner being made, all the rest was easy. Mr. Roberts presented his arm to Mrs. Roberts, and led her on; Mr. Montgomery approached the fair Agatha with a tender smile that seemed to say he was her willing thrall, and they walked on together; and then Mr. Edward, conscious of being rather slower than he ought to be, but feeling perfectly sure, nevertheless, that the moment he set himself seriously to the task of winning the stupid heiress, he should be sure to succeed, held his arm in such a position that Bertha might put hers through it if she chose—and not very well knowing what else to do, she did it; and in this order the party marched on, till the first couple came to a halt, at the head of the table.

CHAPTER XXV.

HAVING reached the furthest or upper end of the large and handsome room in which the *table d'hôte* was spread, Lord Lynberry and Maria, who had marched on in front of the party, turned round, both because they could go no further, and because they wished to reconnoitre the scene of action from the commanding point they had gained. A very long but rather narrow table, capable of accommodating above fifty guests, stretched down the middle of the room. A long line of gaudily-coloured oil-cloth, with a number of little plates arranged symmetrically upon it, was spread down the middle of the table, from the top to the bottom. The little plates contained, for the most part, pink and white sugar-plums, small Savoy biscuits, and walnuts, placed in a circle of six, round a seventh by way of a centre.

The three couples who had followed Lord Lynberry and his fair companion to this point, turned as they turned, and the following words were spoken between the respective couples. Lord Lynberry, on whose left arm Maria's right clung timidly, laid his right hand upon it with a friendly and familiar pressure, which made her quiver from head to foot with inexpressible delight, and said, "How very un-English it all looks, doesn't it? I hope you will like it. Do you think you shall?" To which she replied, in accents which did justice to her words, "Oh! as for me, I never care where I am, so that those I like are with me!" It was a pretty and a gentle speech, and she was rewarded by feeling her arm very kindly pressed against the grateful heart of his young lordship. *How* this apparently slight action affected her feelings the intelligent reader need not be told.

Mr. Roberts and his lady made the second couple. "What a queer way they have of laying their tables, to be sure!" exclaimed

Mr. Roberts. "It does not look very comfortable, my dear, does it?" "Comfortable? Good gracious, Mr. Roberts! who but you would ever think about being comfortable in such delightful society as we have got into here?" replied his wife. "Just observe his lordship and Maria, that's all, and raise up your thoughts, if you can, to what it must be to have a countess for a daughter." These last words were uttered in a low whisper very close to the gentleman's ear, which suggested the necessity of caution so successfully to him, that the only rejoinder was a close pressure of the arm.

"It is an amusing scene," said the elegant Montgomery, looking, as his magnificent stature permitted, over the heads of the company; "but how impossible it is to find," he added, looking down very fully into the upturned eyes of his attentive companion—"how perfectly impossible it is to find a single one of all the native faces which can bear comparison with that of an Englishwoman!"

Of course Agatha smiled, and, having sustained the glance for half a moment, cast down her eyes, and, by a trifling movement of her head, easily managed to make her superabundant ringlets do the office of a veil, to hide the conscious blush to which the compliment had given birth.

"Well, what d'ye think of it?" said Edward to Miss Harrington. "I delight in it of all things, myself, it is so devilish amusing. And they say the champagne is capital. But of course I shan't like it at all unless you do."

This was by far the tenderest speech which Bertha's intended bridegroom had ever yet addressed to her, and she made the most direct reply to it that she had ever yet uttered in return to any of his small attempts at conversation—for she not only appeared to have heard what he said, but distinctly answered by pronouncing the monosyllable "Why?"

But before the young gentleman could sufficiently rally his spirits to profit by this admirable opportunity of explaining himself, a movement of the party behind obliged them to move on.

"Those are our chairs!" exclaimed Lord Lynberry, pushing forward rather eagerly. "Montgomery and I turned them down ourselves. We must not let those fellows get possession of them."

The party accordingly moved on, *en masse*, to the point indicated; and a waiter having already established their prior claim to the bespoken chairs, they immediately took possession of their places.

"I am afraid we must not expect to find very elegant company—I mean the sort of people that we have been used to—at such a place as this," said Mrs. Roberts, taking this opportunity of beginning the system of precaution, by which she intended to guard the family dignity from any injury that a *table d'hôte* might bring upon it. "But where there are a party of gay young people together," she added, "it signifies very little who may chance to be at the same table with them, provided they take care, you know, to keep themselves to themselves."

"Oh dear no, certainly, not the least in the world," replied Mr. Montgomery, to whom, from the circumstance of his sitting opposite to her, this speech was particularly addressed. "But why do you suspect the company of being particularly objectionable to-day?" he added, fixing his eyes upon two very simply dressed females, who at that moment were placing themselves at the table, while two middle-aged men, who accompanied them, instead of sitting down beside them, stood behind their chairs.

"Yes, yes, you have hit the mark," said Mrs. Roberts, laughing, and nodding her head very expressively up and down. "Not quite in our way that, is it?" she added, as her eyes fixed themselves very unceremoniously upon the group Mr. Montgomery had been looking at. The handsome Englishman smiled slightly, but said nothing.

"Mercy on me!" resumed Mrs. Roberts, her eyes still fixed upon the same party, "I hope it won't be too bad to bear! Do you think it will, my dear sir? If you do, we had really better take the girls away at once, you know."

This sudden anxiety on the part of Mrs. Roberts was occasioned by the two females above mentioned, first one and then the other, deliberately taking off their bonnets, and giving them to the two whiskered male individuals who stood behind them. The smooth little heads thus uncovered, had not a single hair arranged in a style which appeared fit, in the judgment of Mrs. Roberts, to be displayed at a table where "first-rate ladies and gentlemen," as she said, condescended to sit down to dinner; and this fact, together with that of their smiling very familiarly to the two whiskered gentlemen, as they indicated the pegs against the wall, upon which it was their pleasure to have their bonnets hung, suggested some very painful ideas to her mind, not only respecting their rank and fortune, but their respectability also.

"You know we are perfectly strangers here, my dear Mr. Montgomery," she said, throwing her ample person as far as she could across the table, in order to speak to him in a whisper, "and I do not scruple to say that I trust entirely to you, as to the propriety of our remaining at the table. For myself, I really should look on, for once and a way, with perfect indifference, quite certain that nothing of the sort could really injure *me*. But for my darling girls!—need I express to you what my feelings are on their account? Dear young creatures! so innocent, so trusting! Do you think that for their sakes, and for that of Mr. Roberts's ward, dear little Bertha Harrington, we ought to leave the society of those dreadfully suspicious-looking people? Answer me as if you were their brother, my dear sir."

"I feel of course inexpressibly flattered by your reference, my dear madam," replied the young man; "and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, your charming daughters will run no risk

whatever in remaining at table with the persons who have just taken their seats at the upper end of it."

There was a curling sort of smile about the handsome mouth of Mr. Montgomery as he said this, which puzzled Mrs. Roberts. It was impossible for her to suppose he was laughing at her anxiety—that was too severe an idea to conceive of any man; but still she strongly suspected he *was* joking in some way or other, and her dignity took the alarm. She looked steadily at him with an air of very grave scrutiny for a minute or two, and then said, "I am quite sure, Mr. Montgomery, that nobody appearing so perfectly a person of fashion as you do, could possibly jest upon such a subject with such a person as myself; and yet, forgive me! I cannot help fancying that you know something about those strange-looking women which you do not choose to mention to me, and that the recollection of it, let it be what it may, makes you feel inclined to laugh. I am sure you *do* know something about those women, Mr. Montgomery; and, to tell you the truth, I really think that if you do not choose to tell me what it is, I must communicate my suspicions to Mr. Roberts, and desire him without further ceremony to lead us all out again. I must say that I think you are wrong to be so very mysterious.' And Mrs. Roberts made a movement, as if she were about to rise from the chair on which she had deposited herself.

"What is mamma going to do?" whispered Agatha to Mr. Montgomery. "The room is getting so full, that if she moves she will never get back to her place. What is it you have been saying to her?"

"I have been saying nothing, I assure you. I believe she has taken fright about those two ladies who are sitting without their bonnets at the top of the table. She is afraid that they are not respectable."

"Mercy on me, what can it signify?" replied Agatha, knitting her brows with a look of great annoyance.

"Certainly nothing, my fair friend!" replied her elegant neighbour. "Besides, I never in my life heard a syllable against their respectability. Do get your mother to sit still, will you?"

"Do you know anything against them?" said Agatha, remarking, as her mother had done, something about the curling lips of Mr. Montgomery which she could not quite understand.

"All I know," he replied, raising his eyebrows with a look of weariness at the prolonged discussion, "all I know about them is, that the tallest is the Princess of D—, and the other, who is her sister-in-law, is married to the Crown Prince of P—."

"Good heavens! Why did you not say so at first!" said Agatha, and then she bent across the table in her turn, and communicated the important intelligence in a whisper to her mother; then again turning to her neighbour, with a reproachful smile, she repeated, "Why did you not say so at first?"

"Good heavens ! what did it signify ?" he replied. "Which soup do you take ? white or brown ?"

The business of dining had now begun, and whatever the younger part of the company might think of it, Mrs. Roberts felt this to be one of those matters of which increasing years and improving wisdom ought to teach the real value ; she therefore only gave one stare of rather incredulous wonder to the words of Agatha, and began to devote her most serious attention to the business of the hour.

Just about the moment when the soup had completed its round, Mr. Vincent entered the room, and paused for a moment within the doorway, to discover whereabouts the party might be of whom he came in search, for he had learned at the Balcony House that the family were gone to dine at the ——. The first eye amidst the party which descried him was Bertha Harrington's, and she immediately stood up, and made him a sign to approach, indicating that there was room near them. He promptly obeyed, and found that at the distance of two places from that of Bertha there was a vacant chair. He gave her a desponding look, and appeared preparing himself to take it, when she turned to Edward Roberts, who was seated next to her, and said with equal promptitude and decision, "Be so good, Mr. Roberts, as to take that vacant chair. I wish to have my cousin, Mr. Harrington Vincent, seated next me."

It would not be easy, perhaps, to decide which of the two gentlemen was the most surprised by this unexpected command ; and however much their feelings upon it might differ in other respects, there was one upon which they were in unison—namely, that under the circumstances they had nothing to do but obey. A very few seconds sufficed to make Mr. Vincent forget his surprise, and feel nothing but pleasure at finding himself in the place he had thus unexpectedly obtained ; and anybody who had overheard the conversation of the two cousins, would have concluded that they had been brought up together in the greatest intimacy, and that they both considered themselves as belonging to each other, as much by necessity as by inclination. He told her how he had called at the Balcony House in the morning, and how dreadfully disappointed he had been at not finding her at home ; and she told him that if he had only come half an hour before, she should have been so glad, for that then they might have walked together. No longer feeling desolate and alone in the world, the presence of her "cousin William,"—of that dear, noble-spirited son of an unhappy mother, whose name and whose idea were so familiar to her ear and to her heart—seemed to have converted her situation from one of almost unmingled suffering into everything that was the reverse of it.

Edward Roberts meanwhile had found such effectual consolation from the conversation of the lady next whom his new position placed him, that he speedily forgot the affront he had received. He had speedily the great satisfaction of discovering that his fair

neighbour was a married woman, which circumstance had become, in his opinion, absolutely necessary to render a tender attachment worth forming; and it more than compensated in his eyes for the dozen or so of years by which she was his senior. What her country might be he could not very accurately decide, nor did this signify a farthing, as on the one fact needful—namely, that she was not English—he could feel no doubt. Perhaps the fact of her speaking English fluently, though rather imperfectly at times, might contribute not a little to make her amiable familiarity of manner the more captivating to him; for notwithstanding his own firm conviction that he spoke French like a native, he was conscious that though quite easy it was very fatiguing. Whether it were that he felt a captivation in her broken English, which he thought might by imitation be added to his own attractions, or that it arose from the habit of imitation so often met with in persons of his order of intellect—whatever were the cause, he had not conversed with her ten minutes before his idiom became wonderfully assimilated to her own.

“Ah!” she exclaimed, looking at him with much kindness, “I perceive, dat is I mean I see, dat you not one English.”

“Alas!” sighed Edward in reply, “alas! would, madam!—dat is, I should much great deal be thankful to *de bon Dieu* if I could say your *aimable soupçon* was correct. But no! I am not so appy. Yes, I am English!”

There was a melancholy pathos in the tone with which he made this avowal, that must have touched any heart not absolutely made of stone; and his new acquaintance, who could not with justice be accused of any hardness in that region, replied with the most soothing gentleness, “*Mais n’importe donc!* Dose who do know to make demselves aimables, have a contri common to dem own selves superior to all de oders in de world!”

“Ah, den!” exclaimed Edward in a fervent whisper, “no need I to ask vot contri boasts your birth. You are of de contri *des aimables!*”

Before the dialogue had reached this point, the young Lord Lynberry had caused the champagne to flow very abundantly amongst his party; and when, by his lordship’s commands, the sparkling flask reached Edward, he transferred the tall glass that came with it, generously filled to the brim, to the hand of his enchanting neighbour, contenting himself for the nonce with the tumbler that stood beside him. Most readers are probably aware that nothing tends to render the act of dining so gay as abundance of tolerably good champagne. The room was getting warm too, and the bright beverage had been so well *frappé* by the attentive waiter, bribed to the task an hour or two before by his thoughtful young lordship, that it was next to impossible to refuse the oft pledged draught; and the consequence was, that Mrs. Roberts—who really, poor woman! did always suffer, as she said, more than

anybody from heat—had the fourth time made the foot of her glass point to the heavens before she recollected what she was about. But then she did, for she began to feel rather giddy, though, as she whispered to Mr. Roberts, she was not in the least uncomfortable ; only she thought she ought to have eaten rather a more solid dinner before she began, and the want of *that* made her head feel as light as a feather.

“However,” she added, “it is never too late to mend, they say, and if that is not as nice a couple of ducks that they have been cutting up there as ever was bought in Leadenhall Market, I am a Dutchwoman. If I don’t manage to get a limb or two of ’em for my share, say that I am a greater fool than you took me for.”

The worthy Mr. Roberts, who had seen the last of the four glasses of champagne disposed of with some uneasiness, exerted himself to procure for his lady such a substantial portion of her favourite dish as might at least for some time keep her silently employed. Nor was he disappointed. Mrs. Roberts, altogether, never felt better in her life, and ate what her attentive husband set before her with great relish ; but when she had concluded this part of the entertainment, she said to one of the waiters, rather louder perhaps than was necessary, “*Apportez une peu de eau de vie, mon bon homme. Je ne suis pas tout à fait bien.*”

“Gracious Heaven, ma’am !” exclaimed the greatly shocked Agatha, “what are you thinking of ?”

“Thinking of, child ? thinking of my stomach, to be sure ! What do I care for all these people, compared to my own health ? I promise you that I will not make myself ill, for all the *parlez-vous* upon earth.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THIS “*delightful dinner-party*,” at the — Hof, produced a considerable effect upon the position of the Roberts party at Baden-Baden. Amidst the class of persons, not a very small one (for all the civilized nations of the earth contribute more or less to compose it), who find themselves able, and hold themselves privileged, to devote their existence here below to the search for amusement, there may generally be found a considerable portion who, let them be of what nation they will, may perhaps be better described by one little English word than by any name, phrase, title, or epithet, which can be found elsewhere. This unpretending little English word is “FAST.”

To the initiated this word requires no explanation, being so pregnant with meaning as almost to defy any possible paraphrase to render it more expressive, more clear, more intelligible ; but for the sake of such readers as may chance to live too much in the shade for the light of such meteor-like phrases to reach them, I will endeavour to explain what it means. A fast man is one who

is endowed with sufficient energy (or audacity) to do everything that he thinks will amuse him, without permitting himself to be restrained by any consideration whatever. The advantages obtained by this sort of energetic character are somewhat analogous to what Shenstone declares to belong to the man who has contrived to obtain the character of an *oddity*. "It sets him in an easy chair for life," says the pastoral poet, who, notwithstanding his pipe and his crook, knew how to listen to the "busy hum of men" as well as of bees. But the easy chair of the *fast* man is a much more luxurious sort of machine than that of the *oddity*; for whereas the sole hope and aim of the *oddity* is to be permitted to sit in peace, without being pestered by any friendly inquiries as to *why* he does this, or *why* he does not do that, the cushioned ease of the *fast* man not only enables him to do and to say what he likes himself, but to insist, with most powerful and mysterious authority, that all admitted to the honour of his intimacy should do so too; that is to say, not what *they* like best, but what *he* likes best.

Still the *fast* class are, on their native soil, of little importance to us, compared to the injurious effect they produce on the reputation of their countrymen abroad. There is not a capital in Europe—to say nothing of spas, baths, wells, and so forth—where a knot of these frolicking, rollicking Englishmen may not be found, not only doing pretty nearly everything that they ought not to do, but doing it with such audacity of display, as of necessity brings all eyes upon them; while by thus thrusting themselves and their noisy impertinence perpetually on the foreground, they contrive very effectually to keep the better class of English travellers comparatively out of sight, leaving their own precious sayings and doings to be quoted by all the nations of the earth, as the moral and intellectual type of the British people. This is a pity, and cannot fail to be much lamented by the patriotic English both at home and abroad; for the class *is* perfectly well known at home, and the effect they produce when on their travels is guessed at without much difficulty. But although the class of men denominated *fast men* may be perfectly well known in England, and sufficiently studied without leaving it, there is another class sent forth by our overflowing population, which can only be seen in perfection abroad—namely, that awful portion of the travelling tribe, properly denominated "*fast ladies*." Of this class the women of England who remain at home have, I really hope and believe, no idea whatever: and were it not that these too, from the noisy audacity with which they bring themselves forward, are frequently pointed out as specimens of *English women of fashion*, it would be desirable to leave them in the shade in which their insignificance at home would naturally place them; but, as it is, it may be useful to raise a voice, however feeble, just to tell all whom it may concern. It may, perhaps, be thought that none whose good opinion is worth conciliating for my beautiful countrywomen can possibly re-

quire the assurance that such *fast young ladies* are NOT SPECIMENS OF THE GENTLEMEN'S DAUGHTERS OF ENGLAND; but, unfortunately, those who try to make themselves the most conspicuous, are always the most observed; and while hundreds of delicate young creatures, brought to the continent for the purpose of completing their highly finished and careful education, come and go as noiselessly and as quietly as spirits permitted to look out upon other worlds than their own—leaving no renown behind them save that of sharing their national boon of superior loveliness—half a-dozen low-bred, bold-spirited young women, intoxicated by finding themselves admitted among persons of station greatly superior to their own, leave as they go a track as conspicuous, and not greatly more refined, than that of a steamboat; while thousands of eyes look after them, thousands of shoulders are shrugged, and the phrase, “Is not that perfectly English?” may be heard muttered in more languages than one.

We laugh at our French neighbours for the blunders they make with our titles; but the Sir Bulwer and the Sir Scott does greatly less discredit to their quickness, than the judgments which they pass so freely upon the deficiency of grace in English manners. Not only the French, however, but all the other nations of Europe, before they can justly appropriate to themselves the merit of discernment while passing this judgment, must rouse their acuteness to the task of not mistaking a bad specimen for a good one.

This dissertation on fast gentlemen and ladies must, however, come to a close, or I shall get retaliated upon by the epithet of “*slow*.” The delightful dinner-party at the — Hof produced, as I have said, a considerable effect upon the position of the Roberts family at Baden-Baden. The tones of their voices, except when indulging in the tender whisperings of flirtation, had been so loud, and their indignation at the vulgarity of the company in general, and at their contriving to live without salt-spoons in particular, expressed both in French and English with so much energy, that they had soon become by far the most conspicuous party in the room. In addition to this glory, of which they were fully conscious, they enjoyed, as we know, the unspeakable delight of having in Mr. Montgomery the handsomest and most fashionable man at the baths, and in Lord Lynberry the heir to the highest title. Can it be matter of wonder that this, together with as many glasses of champagne as could be well offered to young ladies, should have made them very lively indeed? Lively they certainly were, and not only the young ladies, but the father, the mother, and the son also. In their different ways, they were all lively; and then and there it was that for the first time a voice of sufficient authority to bestow a lasting denomination—namely, the voice of Mr. Montgomery himself—pronounced that “the Robertses were regular fast girls, just the right sort of thing to meet abroad, and to make Black-Forest larking pleasant.”

The evening of this important day was passed partly at the rooms, and partly in the half-lighted drawing-room of the Balcony House. But, half-lighted as it was, Mrs. Roberts felt that it was an exceedingly good drawing-room, and could only be taken, at a watering-place like Baden, by people of condition. As to its being only half-lighted, nobody seemed inclined to complain of that. There was a fine moon; both the French windows were opened upon the balcony which gave its name to the domain, and before the end of the evening there were two chairs put out at each window. It was Mr. Montgomery who did this, in his usual gay and lively manner, declaring that "it was a sin to the Lady Moon, not to consecrate their pretty balcony to her as a sort of temple, where all the family might, in turn, repair to perform their orisons to her beauty."

Some of the family, however, appeared to think that this duty might be performed vicariously; for though Mrs. Roberts did step out for half a minute, and seat herself there, while she turned a broad smiling face of approbation upon Mr. Montgomery, the ceremony did not become general. Mr. Roberts, good man, had eaten a particularly hearty dinner; and this, together with his having taken about treble his usual quantity of wine, made him feel, as he told his wife in a whisper as soon as the tea-things disappeared, that he "could not keep out of his bed five minutes longer if he was to die for it." So he walked off, without thinking it necessary to describe his sensations to any one else.

Mr. Vincent, who had accompanied the party from the dinner-table to the rooms, and thence to the Balcony House, had wholly, and without any affectation of reserve on either side, assumed towards Bertha the manner of a near and privileged relation; and soon after the disappearance of Mr. Roberts, he whispered something in her ear, to which she only replied by an inclination of the head. But if the whisper expressed his opinion that she would do well to follow her nominal guardian's example, she received it with very marked obedience, for in the next moment she rose from her chair, and lighting a little taper, which stood ready on a side-table, she glided out of the room, her only farewell being confined to a glance of the eye bestowed on her cousin as she passed.

Mr. Montgomery and Agatha at one window, and Maria and Lord Lynberry at the other, had already begun to offer their lunar orisons; but they had not yet taken possession of the chairs, and Mr. Vincent for a moment put himself *en tiers* with his young pupil and the pensive fair one who stood sighing at his side.

"It is a beautiful night, Miss Roberts," said the tutor; "but are you not fearful of taking cold?"

"Cold!" reiterated Maria, in an accent which seemed in that one syllable to express both astonishment and scorn. "Cold! oh, Heavens! no."

"I am going to the theatre, Lynberry," said Mr. Vincent, without

attempting any contest on the state of the atmosphere, and that of the young lady's shoulders, "will you come with me?"

"No, by Heaven, will I not!" replied the young man, with great energy.

"Well then, good night," said the tutor, and repeating the good night with the accompaniment of a bow to Maria, he stepped back into the room, shook hands with the well-pleased Mrs. Roberts, who thought his going the most fortunate thing in the world, and departed, Mr. Montgomery and Agatha being already too deep in their devotions to permit his offering any farewell without indiscretion.

Mrs. Roberts then settled herself in the most comfortable arm-chair the apartment contained, and drew towards her a book that lay upon the table, and which she placed in a proper position for being read, and then opened it. It chanced that the book was in German, being the property of Bertha, and left there by her the day before. But Mrs. Roberts's perusal of the volume went not so far as to make her aware of this, and it therefore answered her purpose quite as well as any other could have done. For a few delightful moments the happy and triumphant mother indulged herself by glancing first at one window and then at the other, inwardly soliloquizing upon her gratitude to Heaven for having given her sufficient strength of mind to persevere in doing all she had done.

"How long would it have been, I wonder," thought she, "before I should have seen my girls talking in England with two such men as those! If nothing more *was* to come of it, nothing whatever, the advantage to them must be great and important. The very talking of Lord Lynberry in the manner that my dear darling Maria has now undoubtedly a right to do, would be enough to make her fortune among our own set at home. Not that my hopes stop there. Goodness forbid! I know how to manage a little better than that, I hope. Dear girl! I shall live to see—I hope and trust I shall—"

Mrs. Roberts was growing very sleepy; her eyes closed, and opened, and closed again. She did not intend to go to sleep—quite the contrary; but, somehow or other, the last night's ball, the excellent champagne, the easy chair, were altogether too much for her, and she did at length fall fast asleep, her last waking thought easily ripening into a glorious dream, in which she not only saw Maria with a coronet on her brow, but two aunts of the noble bride, seven cousins, and one sour-faced old uncle, all looking as if they were falling into atrophy from envy as they looked at her.

CHAPTER XXVII.

It is to be hoped that my readers feel sufficient interest in all the Roberts family to have remarked that Mr. Edward has not

been mentioned as forming one of the party that went from the rooms to the Balcony House, for the purpose of taking tea, and passing the last hours of that delightful day. No. He went with them from the dinner-table to the rooms, but he did not go thence in their company. Before making his parting bow to his fascinating neighbour at the dinner-table, he had learned from her that her husband was called Monsieur le Comte de Marquemont, that he was a man of very high family in Normandy, that she had on this account been compelled by a tyrannical father to marry him at a frightfully early age, that she was herself the most unhappy of women, and that she was still a great deal younger than she looked, having pined for ten miserable years under that winter of the heart which must inevitably fall upon a warm-hearted young creature like herself under such circumstances. All this was uttered in a way to make Edward quite aware that the charming but unhappy Madame de Marquemont had already read something of gentle sympathy in his eyes, which had beguiled her into being more confidential in her disclosures than she had ever been in all her life before. And he answered to it all as he thought it became a young man of fashion and tender feelings to answer. She further informed him that, in the absence of everything like domestic happiness, she sometimes sought a temporary relief from the amusing stimulation of *rouge-et-noir*.

"Of course," she added, "I never play for any stake, the loss of which could give me a moment's uneasiness. But even at small stakes it really is a delicious amusement."

"I can easily believe that," replied Edward, with vivacity. "I have never tried my luck yet, but I think I shall be tempted to do it some day."

"Let us try our luck together to-night!" exclaimed Madame de Marquemont, throwing a broadside of eyebeams upon him, which seemed to promise every species of success. He answered quite as she expected he would do, and the engagement was ratified by their gently knocking their glasses together before drinking the third glass of Lord Lynberry's champagne.

On leaving the table, however, the lady, with a gentle glance of almost tender rebuke, declined his offered arm.

"Sortez comme vous êtes entré, mon ami," she said, "et puis—on vous attends—au revoir!"

Thus schooled, Edward joined himself with his party as they made their exit, but he might really be excused for feeling, under the present circumstances, that he would rather have been elsewhere; for his father was taking care of his mother, his two sisters very evidently wished for nothing more than they already possessed in the way of escort; and as for his future wife, Miss Bertha Harrington, she who had hitherto appeared of so shy and retiring a temper as to suggest the idea of an intellect too imbecile to permit her entering into conversation with any one, *she* was hanging on the arm of

Mr. Vincent, with a degree of affectionate familiarity which made her look as if she decidedly belonged to him, chatting away, moreover, all the while, with a sort of happy eagerness, that seemed to show her foregone silence to have been anything but natural to her.

The rest of the party, as thus grouped, were disposed of very much to Mr. Edward's satisfaction, but towards *this* couple he looked with a sort of sneer that was about half-and-half made up of ridicule and menace.

"Lynberry would do well to kick his hypocritical tutor downstairs," thought he; "and so I shall most assuredly tell him. And as for that detestable brat of a girl, who has no more idea how to conduct herself in well-bred society than an idiot, I will have her money, if I am obliged to lock her up for life afterwards. Nor do I care one single farthing what she does, or who she flirts with. My method with her will be a very summary one."

In short, Mr. Edward's exit from the banqueting-room formed rather a contrast to the very delightful two hours he had passed in it; but he in some degree relieved the painful condition of his temper, by indulging in that sort of elbowing himself through the crowd, which many Englishmen of his class have recourse to, when seized with a fit of ill-humour, accompanied by a sudden wish of proclaiming their national rights and high personal distinction. This little cloud upon his felicity, however, soon passed away; for the interval between leaving the *table d'hôte*, and again beholding the fascinating woman who had made that table so delightful, did not last long. The majority of the happy idlers at Baden-Baden generally permit themselves after dinner to enjoy the *al fresco* recreation to which the beauty of the scenery and the bright summer sun of Germany gives so much attraction, taking their coffee and ice at one of the little tables placed in the shade, yet so as to completely overlook the bright and sunny scene that spreads beyond. The Roberts ladies, and the gentlemen who were in attendance on them, had agreed that the carriage should be dismissed, and that they should walk after dinner to the rooms.

"It is so pleasant to walk with an agreeable companion! not all the carriages in the world can be half so delightful, in my opinion!" exclaimed Maria, when the subject was discussed; and as everybody seemed to agree with her, the walking was decided on, though Mrs Roberts certainly did think it was rather a pity not to drive up in good style to the portico, when it was sure to be so very full. Walk, however, they did—four very well-pleased pairs of ladies and gentlemen, while the carefully decorated, slight young figure of the well-favoured but frowning Edward sauntered onward alone. But his solitude and his sulkiness did not, as I have before observed, endure long. The party reached the portico, where the Miss Robertses had the delight of perceiving, with a degree of certainty which left no room for doubt, that a multitude

of eyes were turned upon them and their distinguished friends; while the heart of their brother was once more awakened to pleasure as animated as their own, by seeing the very well-dressed little figure of the *piquante* Madame de Marquemont gracefully reclining on a chair, with her tolerably pretty feet sustained by the bar of another, and her parasol in possession of a third. Her wigged and whiskered husband, who, as an experienced eye might easily perceive, belonged to a class of men as distinct from what we mean by *fast men* as a hawk from a pigeon, stood beside her with great politeness, but looking, nevertheless, as if he were rather anxiously waiting for an opportunity to take wing. Edward was at her other side in a moment.

"Give me leave, Mr. Roberts—" Edward had told her his name, and she had not forgotten it—"give me leave, Mr. Roberts," she said, "to present you to *mon mari, le Comte de Marquemont*. *Mon ami*, permit me to make you acquainted with my amiable young English acquaintance, Monsieur Roberts."

"Fitzherbert Roberts," said Edward, smiling and bowing with a vast deal of Parisian grace.

"*Enchanté, monsieur!*" replied the Comte. "The Fitzherbert is a known name—to *nous autres*—persons of condition—Sir Fitzherbert sounds like the name of a brother!"

The young Edward smiled, blushed, and bowed, pressed his hand upon his heart, and declared himself "*bien fière, et bien touché*," at hearing such a phrase from such lips.

"*Ah ça!*" exclaimed the Comte in reply, "*rien de plus à propos* than my making your acquaintance at this moment. Madame, though you would never guess it, is your countrywoman; but being of *haute naissance*, it was thought desirable to bring her up in France, where she has, in effect, acquired that last grace to which such a person as yourself, Sir Fitzherbert, cannot be insensible. But together with this Parisian charm, *ma bonne petite mignonne de femme* retains all the charming reserve of your island, and when, as at the present moment, I am under the *désolante nécessité* of leaving her, it is only to the care of a compatriot that I could venture to confide her. She is too reserved!—certainly too reserved. It is often a pain to me! She will make no acquaintance! Ah! she is so English at heart! But with you, Sir Fitzherbert, I have no scruple—your name is enough!" And with these words he bowed himself off, leaving our happy juvenile in possession of the lady, the three chairs, and the little round marble table that stood beside them. Madame de Marquemont raised her eyes to his face with a very sweet, shy, melancholy smile, but before venturing to speak she breathed a gentle sigh.

"Why should you sigh, madame, at what makes me so supremely happy?" exclaimed Edward, with great animation. She smiled again, and for *toute réponse* removed her parasol from the chair it occupied. Edward obeyed the command thus bewitchingly con-

veyed; and a little altering the position of the chair, so as to bring himself pretty nearly face to face with his enchanting companion, he bent forward, and murmured with a vast deal of feeling a repetition of the question, "Why should you sigh?"

"Alas! *cher ami*," she replied, "the heart of a woman is a strange mystery! Most surely I do not sigh for the absence of my husband, who, from the very hour at which, as a mere child, I took his name, has been an object of the most unmitigated aversion to me. Ah, no! It is not for his absence that I sigh, Fitzherbert!"

"Oh, wherefore then?" returned the young gentleman, causing his chair to take an angle of ninety-five degrees in advance towards her, and thereby bringing his face very particularly near to hers.

"Ah! *de grace!*" she exclaimed, turning her head slightly on one side. "I trust solely to your discretion. Let me find you worthy of it!"

"Angel!" he replied, in a very soft whisper, and looking at her with an air of admiration which proved that he uttered the epithet in all sincerity. She returned the look, and then both remained silent for a few seconds, during which the memory of Edward ran back to Paris, and to Madame de Soissonac, and the superiority of his present idol struck him forcibly. "Ah!" thought he, recalling the slight sketch which his new friend, Monsieur le Comte de Marquemont, had given of the birth and education of his fascinating wife, "ah! the real fact is, that a woman made by Heaven exactly to suit me must be born in England, but bred in France."

Scarcely had this short soliloquy passed across his hurried thought, when the silence was broken by Madame de Marquemont, who playfully extending her parasol to rouse him from his fit of abstraction by touching his arm, said, "*Cher ami!* this will never do! for mercy's sake order something, or we shall have every eye upon us, waiters included, who will be sure to tell us in a minute or two that this dear little table is wanted—and then we shall have no longer an excuse for continuing to sit in this enchanting spot—*comprenez-vous, mon ami?*"

"What shall I order?" exclaimed Edward, starting as if just awakened from sleep. "Only tell me what you wish, and it shall be here in a moment!"

"Nay—I know not—*cela m'est égal*—coffee and ice, I think—*café noir, avec petit verre* first, you know—and then *glace à la vanille*."

Edward struck upon the marble table with a little key which he took from his pocket for the purpose; making assurance doubly sure, as he did so, that he had sundry broad silver pieces in the said pocket—a bit of good fortune which he owed, as usual, to the indulgence of his mother, who had listened to his declaration that he was absolutely without a decent pair of boots in the world, and had provided him that mornin' with the sum which he had told

her was necessary for the purchase of this highly necessary commodity. Great, certainly, was his comfort and satisfaction as his fingers noiselessly but firmly grasped the assurance that he had the power of gratifying the wishes of the charming Countess, without endangering the Fitzherbert fraternity which had been established between them, by having to tell the waiter in her hearing that he would call again. Nothing could exceed the pretty graceful playfulness with which this charming woman permitted herself first to imbibe the contents of the *petit verre*, through the innocent medium of her cup of coffee, and then to take two ices, which she confessed was rather more than she liked so immediately after dinner, though later in the evening she often took two or three, because they so particularly agreed with her, but *now* she did it only because it afforded such a perfect excuse for sitting still, and talking.

And now, by gentle degrees, the twilight was fast sinking into darkness; and then, by degrees less gentle, the windows of the great saloon assumed a brilliance that, to many eyes, much more than rivalled that of the departed sun.

"What a delicious scene! is it not?" said Madame de Marquemont, suddenly rising, and passing her arm under that of Edward, who of course rose also. "Delicious indeed!" he replied, tenderly pressing the arm which had been so frankly intrusted to him. "Shall we not wander away a little under those trees?" he added, "nobody will notice us! See! how many are doing the same thing!" "Oh! Heavens, no!" replied the lady, "you know not what you propose! No, my friend, the only way in which we can enjoy each other's conversation here is by appearing to *seek* the public eye instead of *shunning* it. The time may come, perhaps. But now, dear friend, let us enter the *salle de jeu*; everybody there will be too much occupied by their own concerns to take any notice of us;—*allons!*" And so saying, she drew him towards the entrance.

Edward felt that he had indeed made acquaintance with an angel, and that to oppose her gentle and benignant wishes in any way would be destroying a brighter perspective of future happiness and future fashion than had ever yet opened before him. True it was, as he knew, alas! only too well, that from some unaccountable difficulty about getting ready money, which must of course arise from some abominably bad management on the part of his father, it was considerably more than likely that he should find himself embarrassed in the prosecution of this most flattering friendship, by the want of what it was utterly impossible that any young man of fashion could do without. Money he must have, and money he would have, or, instead of persevering in his good resolutions, and consenting to marry the detestable Bertha, he would make both father and mother understand that it was his immutable resolution to shoot himself before their eyes. These were great thoughts, and

might have taken a good while to ripen in an ordinary mind, but in that of Edward Roberts they had reached maturity within the short space of time which intervened between his quitting his chair beside the little marble table, and entering the brilliant saloon in the middle of which was placed a mightier table, around which at least a score of persons were already seated, whose hearts and souls were every instant becoming more and more tumultuously agitated by the vicissitudes of *rouge-et-noir*.

"Ah, *par exemple!*" exclaimed the countess, "you and I have engaged, you know, to try our luck together at the table; now let me see how *habile* you are in obtaining two good seats for us. I will be close to you, *ami*. Get the chairs, and they shall not be lost by any awkwardness of mine; *je m'y connais*."

Trembling to his fingers' ends under the influence of a variety of emotions, yet most prodigiously delighted in the midst of them, the obedient young man exerted himself strenuously to find space at the table for the two chairs which he had seized upon; and was rewarded by success, by the aid of a trifling look from the croupier, who saw the unmitigated eagerness of the young man's glance. The countess kept her promise, and was ready to drop, without embarrassment of any kind, into the seat thus ably prepared for her.

"*Eh bien!* How shall we start?" said she. "You shall choose the colour first. Let us begin *tout doucement*. Put down five francs for each of us on whichever colour you prefer."

Edward thrust his hand into his pocket and drew thence the two pieces, which he pushed forward as boldly as he could, upon the point nearest to him on which he perceived that money had been placed by others. It was done with a faltering hand, however, and the lady, who had already provided herself with a *rateau*, gave the coins a little push further, saying, as she looked into the face of her companion with a bewitching smile, "*Soyez confiant, mon ami*." Edward attempted to return the smile, but did not succeed, for at that moment he was deep in meditation as to what he should do, and what he should say, if he should in a few minutes find himself without the power of depositing the stake his lovely friend might call for. He had still four five-franc pieces in his pocket, and that was all!

"*Gagné!*" exclaimed Madame de Marquemont, raking out with a pretty languid movement, intended to display her total indifference to the result, the four pieces which belonged to the partnership. The heart of Edward seemed to leap into his throat. Here was his stake doubled, and the horrible exposure upon which he had been meditating postponed for—perhaps for ever! With eyes sparkling with love and joy, the happy youth snatched up two of the pieces, and dropped them into his pocket, while with the other hand he pushed the remaining two towards the lady, saying, "Now it is your turn to choose."

"*Mais non, mon ami, non.* You must push your success. But

where are the other pieces ? *Mon ami !* what are you thinking of ? You must double the stake this time at the very least. Ah ! I see you are a novice ; but you shall be my pupil, and you will soon understand the thing better."

Edward felt rather sick. He had thought himself safe for such a long time ! And now he might be plunged into all the misery he so deeply dreaded within the space of a moment. But there was no help for it, and once more struggling to render his hand respectably steady, he pushed four pieces to precisely the same spot on which he had deposited his first venture.

"The little *coup de rateau* from me must be added, I see," said Madame de Marquemont, "or the charm will not be complete, I suppose." At that moment Edward could not speak. He had the wisdom not to attempt it, for he felt that he could not articulate a syllable ; but in the next, the enchanting voice of his fair friend murmured in his ear, "*Encore, cher Fitzherbert. Que tu sais bien choisir !*" Too much agitated to appreciate the fascinating familiarity of the pronoun thus addressed to him, or even to see the tender smile with which it was accompanied, Edward only replied by exclaiming, "God bless my soul, how very lucky !" If the charming Madame de Marquemont's mental soliloquy at this moment consisted of the exclamation, "What an idiot !" it mattered little, for not only did the happy Edward hear it not, but his spirits were in such a state of exaltation that he would scarcely have cared for it if he had. It is not necessary to follow the interesting heir of the Roberts family through all the vicissitudes of that sometimes varying, but, on the whole, most happy evening. Now and then a few pieces were lost ; but when they left the table for the purpose of repairing to the lodgings of the lady, where Edward was invited to sup on "lettuce and a glass of Rhine wine," the joint stock amounted to thirty pieces, which Madame de Marquemont divided between them in the prettiest and most playful manner imaginable. And who, in Edward's predicament, could have been so churlish as to remember that she forgot to reimburse him for her share of the original stake ?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WILLIAM HARRINGTON VINCENT was as well-principled a young man as if he had had no worthless relations belonging to him ; and, although he was himself beginning to think Baden-Baden one of the most agreeable places he had ever visited, he was also beginning to think that it would be right and proper to leave it with as little delay as possible. This self-denying opinion, however, was not occasioned by any consciousness that he was falling in love with his little cousin Bertha more seriously than the relative position of their respective fathers would render wise or convenient ; on the contrary, if he *was* falling in love with her, he was not con-

scious of it at all, being honestly persuaded in his heart that the deep interest he felt for her arose solely from the forsaken loneliness of her position, joined to the affectionate memory he retained of her mother. He was aware, indeed, that she was a lovely and intelligent young creature, and that there was something in the unrestrained and confiding frankness with which she seemed to throw herself upon his cousinly protection, which was touching and endearing in no common degree. But poor Vincent was not one of those spoilt children of fortune, who never see anything that they think pretty and particularly worth having, without fancying they have a right to possess it. On the contrary, it was quite sufficient that any object should appear in his eyes particularly valuable, in order to make him feel at once that he had nothing to do with it. The well-conducted son of a selfish, dissolute father is ever considered, and very naturally, as a being entitled to the pity and commiseration of the whole world; and yet the fact is by no means of unfrequent occurrence, that a son so situated finds in his misfortune the seeds of higher qualities, and more self-denying strength of mind, than would ever have taken root in his character under other circumstances. And so it was with the acreless heir of Everton Park. Forgetfulness of himself and his own individual interests had been taught him in a multitude of ways, among which the example received from his mother, and the warning received from his father, were about equally efficacious. He was quite aware, as I have said, that his cousin Bertha was a very fascinating as well as a very estimable little personage; but he was quite aware also that her fortune would be such as to entitle her to marry in a way to place her in a station exceedingly different from that of the wife of the son of a ruined gamester. True it was that, although only a first cousin, once removed, he stood starred in the baronetage as heir to the title and large entailed estates of Bertha's father. But that father was still almost a young man; he was now a widower, and had given both his father and himself quite sufficient indications of his hostile feelings towards them, to make it scarcely a matter of doubt that he would marry again as speedily as possible, if only in the hope of obtaining an heir less distasteful to him. The idea of gaining the affections of his young cousin had, therefore, only entered his head as a thing most scrupulously and cautiously to be avoided. He was by no means insensible to the fact that she disliked the people she was with, to a degree which might almost perhaps have placed her in Dr. Johnson's honoured category of a good hater; and he attributed, very justly, a considerable portion of the pleasure she so evidently took in his society, and the strong measures she adopted to make it evident that she considered him as her natural protector, as the result of it. And thus, feeling an honest confidence in himself, and a most sincere conviction that the friendship so pleasantly springing up between them could bring no danger of any kind to her, he permitted him-

self with a safe conscience to enjoy it : and enjoy it he certainly did, to a degree that made his suddenly determining to quit Baden an act of great self-denial.

But there was something in the style and manner in which Lord Lynberry and Miss Maria Roberts treated each other, which began very seriously to alarm him. His young pupil had many good qualities, but he was hot-headed and impetuous ; and his vehement admiration for beauty was so little concealed, that his tutor might have been living, during the seven or eight months they had been together, in a state of constant alarm from the expectation of his eloping with some fair one or other, had not the *constant inconsistency* of his youthful lordship reassured him, and converted his reiterated confessions and protestations of everlasting attachment into a source of more amusement than anxiety. But Vincent had never seen his young friend entangled before in such a web as that which the tender Maria appeared to have thrown over him ; and he was the more startled by the effect it seemed to have produced, from the circumstance of his having really believed that, in the case of Bertha Harrington, an impression had been made on the heart of Lord Lynberry of a much more serious kind than any which had preceded it. In this belief he was, perhaps, partly right, and partly influenced by the consciousness that, in the case of Bertha, there was at least *de quoi faire* a lasting impression. But not only had this seemingly serious love-fit been suddenly and totally effaced, but it had been succeeded by such unprecedented marks of passionate devotion to this new charmer on the part of the young man, and such undisguised warmth of reciprocal tenderness on that of the lady, that Mr. Vincent knew not what to think of it, yet felt that he should have no great right to be surprised if, at any moment of the day or night, he were to hear that his young charge had, by the aid of a team of post-horses, set off with Miss Maria Roberts for the nearest spot where it would be possible for them to unite their fortunes for life. This was a consummation so very devoutly to be deprecated, that poor Vincent, with his habitual abnegation of all selfish feelings, determined upon announcing to Lord Lynberry his intention of immediately proceeding to Rome, between which city and Naples it was the wish of Lord Southtown that his son should divide the ensuing winter.

The time that the really anxious young tutor had fixed upon for communicating the resolution he had taken was the hour of breakfast, at the interval of five days from the eventful ball at which the fickle lordling had made the transfer of his heart from Miss Bertha Harrington to Miss Maria Roberts. Vincent, as usual, was the first in the breakfast-room, but Lord Lynberry came whistling into it not long after him ; and, as the tutor contemplated his very youthful aspect, he trembled to think how great a degree of responsibility must inevitably attach to himself, both in the eyes of the parent and of the world in general, if he permitted him to re-

turn to his native country as the husband of the fair but *fast* Maria.

"Well, my dear Lynberry," began the tutor, when the coffee and eggs had been handed about between them for a few minutes, "well! do you not think that we have almost had enough of Baden-Baden?"

"Thou art mad to say so!" returned the young man, in high tragedy tone. "Enough of Baden? Enough of my lovely, my adored Maria? Vincent! thou must know me for a man of very patient mood, or thou wouldst not tempt my choler so desperately—no, not for thy life."

"Good faith, my lord, I have no intention of tempting your choler at all," replied Vincent, laughing, "but you know, I believe, that I act under orders, and if I have blundered not in the reading of them, it is about time for us to turn our faces towards Italy."

"Willingly, *mon cher*, provided always that my face at least, let it be turned which way it will, shall be so placed as to enable me to glue my eyes upon the idol of my affections."

Vincent looked grave, and remained silent, not very well knowing whether it would be most wise or least so, to lead the impetuous young gentleman to explain himself so clearly as to permit of a serious remonstrance in return. While thus absorbed in reverie, the anxious tutor kept his eyes fixed upon his coffee-cup; had he looked up and encountered the glance of his pupil, he would have seen an expression in it that would have puzzled him. The glance was both scrutinizing and comic, and as far removed as possible from what Vincent would have expected to meet had he taken courage to look at him.

"Well, Vincent!" exclaimed Lord Lynberry at length, "what are you thinking about?"

"I am thinking, my lord, that I have a painful duty to perform; but that, painful or not, I must and will perform it to the best of my judgment and power. Confess, my lord, that you already understand what I mean, and that your conscience tells you in what direction my duty lies."

"My conscience, Mr. Vincent?" replied Lord Lynberry, with rather more gravity than was usual to him. "I doubt a little, my dear sir, whether at this moment it be not your conscience rather than mine, which, if properly awakened, might assist most effectually in enabling us to understand each other."

"As how, Lord Lynberry?" said the tutor.

"As thus, Mr. Vincent," replied the pupil. "My perspicacity, though not my conscience, leads me to divine, that the sort of lecture you appear to have been preparing for me relates to my devoted attentions offered at the shrine of the transcendent Miss Maria Roberts. Is it not so, sir?"

"And if it be, my lord?" returned Vincent, looking at him with some degree of surprise.

"Why then if it be, Mr. Vincent, your conscience ought to tell

you that you have done your pupil and your friend less than justice in supposing that your assistance was wanting to save him from being entangled for life in the chains of such a charmer as Miss Maria. Out upon you, Vincent ! I give you cause enough, and free permission to boot, to accuse me of a thousand jackanape tricks, that do but small credit to my wisdom ; but I know not, Vincent, what thought or feeling ever escaped from me in my graver moments, which can justify you in suspecting that I want your assistance to save me from the peril of becoming Miss Maria Roberts's husband."

This was spoken with feeling as well as gravity, and Mr. Vincent instantly felt that he deserved the rebuke, and as instantly acknowledged it.

"Forgive me, my dear Lynberry," he said, "forgive the injustice I have done to your taste, in favour of the deep anxiety I feel for your happiness. Had I not been your tutor, and had I not had my fears awakened to a sort of morbid sensibility by the responsibility attached to the situation, I do not believe that I ever should have suspected you of falling seriously in love with Miss Maria Roberts. And yet, Lynberry, though my tender concern for your matrimonial projects in this instance may have been somewhat supererogatory, do you not think I should do right to lecture you a little on the sinfulness of the false hopes to which you are giving birth in the bosom of the young lady ?"

"Do so by all means, my dear Mr. Tutor, if you believe yourself called to the task by the voice of duty ; but you must excuse me, if, while I listen to you—which of course I shall do with all possible respect—you must excuse me, I say, if I congratulate myself a little upon my own superior knowledge of the human heart ; for I presume, when you talk of Miss Maria's hopes, you mean her tender hopes of having her fond affection for me returned, and not of her ambitious hopes of coaxing me into putting my honoured mother's coronet upon her head ?"

Vincent gazed at his young pupil with very considerable satisfaction as he said this, but with considerable surprise also, and then laughingly exclaimed,—

"Oh excellent young man !

How much more older art thou than thy looks !"

You have relieved me from an immense load, Lynberry, both present and future. I shall not easily again take fright about you ; and as to the fast young ladies, as Montgomery calls them, I believe that I must be contented to let them take care of themselves."

"Which they will do according to the fashion of their tribe, very assiduously assuming the credit of having enslaved a viscount, if they gain nothing else. Set your heart at rest, good Vincent, and let them labour in their vocation, as it is their nature to do. They would have to thank you for small mercies if you took them out

of it. But now tell me, Vincent, as frankly as I have now exposed to you the real state of my feelings towards the incomparable Maria, tell me frankly, if you think that all the enthusiastic admiration I avowed to you for Miss Harrington was of the same fashion and fabric as that inspired by Miss Maria?"

Lord Lynberry coloured as he asked the question, and Mr. Vincent coloured as he answered it.

"You must be perfectly aware, my lord, that I cannot think so," he said, "for that if I did—" and here the tutor stopped.

"You would blow my brains out, you would say," rejoined Lord Lynberry, "and it would be more obviously your duty, I think, than Quixotizing in the cause of the fair Roberts. But I am strongly tempted, Vincent, tutor as you are, to lecture you a little in my turn, and you ought to pay the more attention to my preaching, because it is not, as you will perceive from the nature of it, the result of jealousy. And first I will tell you, as an offering to your cousinly feelings, that, amidst all the band of adorables before whom my susceptible heart has bowed, Miss Harrington is the only one to whom I should never have taken the liberty of making love, without hoping, as the old ladies say, that something might come of it. But I had just sense enough to perceive, in the course of a very few hours, that I might just as well fall in love with the moon; so I judiciously said to my heart, '*halte là*,' and obedient to command, from being perhaps so very completely hopeless, the said heart did halt, and, having taken one long breath, wheeled about, and then set off to engage in a mock fight in rather a different direction. The scheme has answered perfectly; and I am now not only quite convalescent myself, but in a condition to bestow some little care and attention on the safety and welfare of my fellow-creatures; and you, Mr. William Harrington Vincent, are the first to whom I feel disposed to address a little advice. My reverence for you is so great, generated of course by our relative positions, that I am quite ready to believe you totally and altogether above the contemptible weakness of falling in love yourself; but, notwithstanding your advanced age, Sir Tutor, I do suspect that your young cousin, so utterly insensible to the adoration I was so perfectly ready to offer her, is falling, or rather *has* fallen, over head and ears in love with you, who have perhaps never offered her any adoration at all; and if this be so, there may be good and sufficient reasons for our leaving Baden, Vincent, without reckoning any peril from the risk of my marrying the enchanting Roberts."

"That you have formed a tolerably just estimate of the state of Miss Maria Roberts's heart, Lynberry, is very likely, I think," replied Vincent, in a tone of very particular calmness, "but you must excuse me if I venture to doubt your power of reading all other young ladies' hearts as accurately as you have done hers. The character of my young cousin, for instance, is one that I

confess I think it would by no means be easy to read ; and had I not thought so before, the complete blunder you have made respecting the nature of her feelings for me might convince me of it. Believe me, my dear Lynberry, the only interest I have in her eyes is that of a relation and natural protector, the want of which she feels, I am sorry to say, with most painful acuteness. You must perceive, by my manner, that I not only take the observation you have made in good part, but that, unfounded and blundering as it is, I give you perfect credit for sincerity and friendly feeling in making it ; and on your part you will, I am sure, give me equal credit for sincerity when I assure you that you have been wholly mistaken. So now, I think, we may both stay at Baden as long as we like, having by our mutual openness convinced each other that there can be no danger for any one in our doing so."

"So be it," said Lord Lynberry, rising. "I like the place prodigiously, and could almost be tempted to quote Shakspeare—dear, old-fashioned fellow !—and exclaim

"Accursed be he who first says Hold ! Enough !"

The two young men then parted, very tolerably well satisfied with each other, and each enjoying the comfortable persuasion that he might go on in the pleasant path he was in, without any fear that it would lead him wrong.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AND the elegant Montgomery—was his devotion to the captivating Miss Agatha of the same nature as that of his younger friend for the captivating Miss Maria ? The following extract from a letter which he put into the Baden-Baden post about this time, addressed to a certain Lady Charlotte Polfston, may answer the question satisfactorily.

"You are unjust, dear Charlotte ; I have acknowledged and submitted to the necessity of delaying our marriage till you are of age, as mildly and meekly as you could do yourself ; and I suppose you did not expect that I should listen to the perfectly unexpected reasonings which induced us to do so, by any particularly rapturous form of thanksgiving—did you ? The only syllable like complaint which I have uttered, since the lawyers, with such devilish perspicuity, pointed out the reasons for this delay, was when your aunt, with so much exemplary and unshrinking candour, obligingly informed me that she particularly wished me to go abroad during the odious ten months that I am to wait for you, like a second Jacob. I believe I did then burst forth a little ; yet here I am, not so much, as you know well enough, to please your rich aunt, as to comply with the fastidious delicacy of her *exigeante* niece. Yet now you have actually the ingratitude to reproach me, because,

forsooth, you perceive by my letters that I should like better to return to England than go on to Rome.

"Yes, Charlotte, you are unjust, and, as a proof of this, I beg to assure you that at the very time I received your letter, I was as busily engaged as a man could well be in making love. It is perfectly true; Lady Charlotte; and, though possibly I may think that you deserve to be made a little jealous, as a punishment for your severity to me, I give you my honour that I am not led to make this disclosure from any wish to inflict this painful emotion upon you, but solely to prove to you the perfect openness and sincerity of my character. I wish to Heaven you were here to see her and to see me. I do not say this because I want to see you; no, really, I do not mean that. I think it and say it because I would give the price of a little Watteau for the pleasure of seeing her sketched into your book of 'historical reminiscences.'

"She is a very pretty-looking girl, I assure you, this is perfectly true; but this, I fairly confess, is in my eyes her least attraction. No! it is her elegance, her grace, her fashion, which have rendered her irresistible in my eyes. Where she was born and bred, I know not exactly—somewhere in or about London, I believe; but to witness the effect of the perfect conviction which has come upon her, that her having crossed the Channel has levelled every species of inequality between her citizen-race and the aristocracy of Europe in general and England in particular, is, without any exception, the highest comedy in real life that I have ever yet had the good fortune to look upon. As to my *not* making love to her, Charlotte, it would be as impossible as the not inhaling air when in the act of breathing. I do make love to her, Lady Charlotte; and let my sincerity in avowing the sin atone for its commission. Do not fancy, however, that the sweet creature's peace of mind is likely to be endangered by my tender attentions; be very sure that no such danger exists. My engagement to you is as notorious as the papers can make it, and there are many here who know how I am situated as well as I do myself. However, I have not trusted to this, but have delicately hinted to this charming specimen of poor England's travelling aristocracy, that, sensible as I had unfortunately become of her superior attractions, I was unhappily bound by an engagement which prevented my laying myself at her feet. And how do you think the darling answered me? By sorrow and despair?—by dignity and repulsion?—by reproaches and contempt? Nothing like it, my dear friend. Her reply, as nearly as I can remember it, was in these words.

"I well know, Mr. Montgomery, that, among persons in our class of life, the heart cannot always be listened to in affairs of marriage; but let us thank Heaven that, on the continent at least, there is an emancipation of sentiment, which in a great degree neutralizes the misery produced by enforced ties. The pleasures of travelling are great, doubtless, to persons of refined taste; but

its *uses* are greater still, for it enables them to throw aside the absurd prejudices of insular education, and to feel that the higher classes of society ought to be in a very great measure released from them.'

"There, my Lady Charlotte, is a specimen of the diffusion of useful knowledge, obtained by *les demoiselles ambulantes de la Grande Bretagne*; but build not any false theories upon this. I most assuredly hope to take you abroad with me next year, but no part of this species of new light is at all likely to reach you. You are not to suppose, however, that I ascribe my mystical power to your rank, or mine either, as a shield against the easy morality of the Continent—I have no such stuff in my thoughts, I assure you. But there is a species of folly, which really, in some cases, almost seems to amount to madness, and from which you would be exempt—I mean that which arises from the intoxication experienced by travelling ladies and gentlemen, in stations somewhat below the middle class, on suddenly finding themselves associated with persons of superior rank. It really seems as if the adoration of title in our country (where alone, as distinct from *race*, it is revered) generated a positive disease of the moral system. The incredible, the inconceivable tricks played on the continent of Europe by the persons (frequently bankrupt tradesmen or merchants) whose finances do not permit their living with ease at home, are such as can scarcely be accounted for without supposing that monomania has something to do with it. I have seen such people shun all association with travelling families of private station (however well educated and perfectly respectable in every way, and really holding a position in society at home very many degrees superior to their own) with the most scrupulous and careful avoidance, while their efforts to get introduced to both women and men, however infamous, who have titles, have something of feverish eagerness, which it is at once ludicrous and melancholy to behold. And thus you see, sweet friend, that in spite of the little comedy with which I am amusing myself, I moralize the subject very seriously; but, if you think it would induce your aunt to arrive at the conclusion that I had better return to England, I will give you leave to paint my flirtation in any colours you please."

Mr. Montgomery's statement, as given above, of what had passed between himself and Agatha, was perfectly correct, and most perfectly true, as also was his observation that there was something exceedingly like madness in the state of mind of that enthusiastic young lady. Certain it is, however, that, till her arrival at Baden, the FINE frenzy which had taken possession of her was not without the very usual symptom, common to young ladies of her class, of fancying that every single man who spoke to them *might* be converted, with proper skill and good management, into that necessary, or at any rate very convenient, commodity called a husband;

and such was assuredly her first thought when making the acquaintance of Mr. Montgomery. But Lord Lynberry told her sister that his handsome friend was engaged to be married to a lady in England; and, though the report was a shock to her, it came accompanied with such confirmation of his being a man of fashion—for Lord Lynberry had mentioned the rank of the lady—that her wish for his acquaintance was rather increased than diminished by it. Some hope, some slight, vague hope, there might be, perhaps, that her charms might detach him from the noble lady to whom he was affianced; but such hope, if it existed at all, was greatly less important to her than the dearer and more present one of having her name united with his, as that of the lady he most admired at the baths. This was a great step in the young lady's progress towards deserving the epithet of "*fast*." In order, however, fully to comprehend the sort of set of which Miss Roberts is a type, it is necessary to premise that she was by no means one of that unhappily large class of females who are likely to become the victims of their own too tender hearts. Miss Agatha Roberts was as little likely to arrive at such a catastrophe as any young lady could be who, among her other bulwarks of protection, had *not* that of principle. But, notwithstanding this deficiency, a great many things were more likely to happen to Miss Agatha than that she should be destroyed by the vehemence of her affections; yet next to the pleasure of seeing in all the eyes around her that the marked attentions of Mr. Montgomery were observed, was that of believing that she had succeeded in persuading him that of all mankind she loved and could love but him alone. That she deceived herself in thus believing, is most true; but not the less for that did she enjoy the gratification of fancying, that let who would, in future years, fill the domestic English situation of mistress of his house, she, in the delightful present, filled that of mistress of his heart—a persuasion which gratified her in a thousand ways. Nevertheless, even this gratification was nothing in comparison of that arising from the conviction that all the noble eyes, both male and female, which constituted the bright congress of Baden-Baden, took cognizance of the all-important fact, that the most elegant man in the society made her the object of his most particular attentions. If ruin of any kind threatened her, *this* was the source of it, not any weakness of the heart; and, although the conduct of the lively, thoughtless Montgomery towards her was anything but defensible, its turpitude was of a very different order from that of a man exerting all the powers of pleasing bestowed upon him by Heaven, for the purpose of amusing himself during a moment, by rendering wretched for life a creature whose worst fault, perhaps, was the loving him better than herself. Of this, or of anything in the least degree approaching it, Mr. Montgomery was not guilty; yet he was one of a class who have a good deal to answer for, too; for he was an English gentleman, and one well calculated in many respects to do that

justice to his greatly misunderstood country, of which it so greatly stands in need. He, as well as many others belonging to the same class of society, might, if it so pleased them, redeem throughout the Continent, in a very great degree, the national disgrace which now rests upon England, of being *the worst-mannered nation in Europe*. Young men travel more than old ones; and the young men who come forth from among us are greatly too apt to carry with them the holiday feelings of boys escaped from control, and go frolicking over the world without remembering for a moment that they are undergoing the ordeal of a very strict observation, and obtaining a European reputation, both for themselves and their country, which is for the most part far from being favourable, and for the most part far from being deserved. That more highly finished gentlemen can be found in any part of the world than in England, is an opinion which none can entertain who have had fair opportunities for forming a judgment on the subject; but as, from possessing both the power and the inclination for travelling greatly beyond that of any other people, the opportunities for forming this judgment arise, ninety-nine times out of a hundred, not in England but out of it, does it not become a positive patriotic duty in the young men who go forth to sun themselves, and to be seen as well as to see—does it not behove them, each and all of them, to act a little more up to their own idea of what an English gentleman ought to be, than it is their usual travelling custom to do? Every Englishman may in this way prove himself a patriot. We do not want any Quintus-Curtius doings, in these piping days of ours, but it might be as well that we should not yield ourselves up to this imputation, of being the worst-mannered nation in Europe, merely for the sake of indulging the naughty-schoolboy feeling that we may do what we will when we go out to play, because there is nobody by to punish us.

Maria's case was a different one. She really was a pretty girl; and believing herself a great deal prettier, and feeling convinced that a series of lucky accidents had placed her quite in the very highest ranks of society, she determined to profit by these great advantages, and make a splendid match. Though she did not exactly perceive all that passed in the mind of the young Lord Lynberry, she had become quite aware that he liked to be made love to. It was to this peculiarity in his lordship's temperament that she owed her triumph over Bertha Harrington; and it was in consequence of feeling assured of this fact, that she fell immediately a thousand fathoms deep in love with Lord Lynberry; and, had a keener wit than Lord Lynberry's been at work to watch her, a great deal of very fair amusement might have been elicited by noting all the little trickeries with which she played her part. She had her gay fits and her pensive fits, each so well calculated to set off the other! and if his lordship, by accident, chanced to express any-

thing approaching an opinion, did not her whole being, heart, intellect, and soul imbibe it? Did it not pervade every feeling and purpose of her existence? Did a flower receive a passing word of praise from his beloved voice, was there any other flower under the wide vault of heaven which she could care to cherish in her bosom, or adorn her flowing locks withal? His lordship preferred green tea. She knew not how it was, but somehow or other she had begun to find out, that if there was in the world something that she hated worse than everything else, it was black tea. In short it was not her fault if in him she did not live and move and have her being. A good deal of this escaped his light-hearted lordship's notice, but he saw enough to amuse him exceedingly; and if at last he did feel a little piqued at the suspicion that the young lady was thinking more of his coronet than of him, and feel a little disposed to try his powers of being personally fascinating, there was a good deal in the conduct both of mother and daughter to excuse him.—And thus things went on for another month or so, the Roberts family decidedly becoming more obnoxious to observation every day, and, in their own estimation at least, more celebrated for their *bon ton*, high fashion, and unquestionable superiority, in everything desirable, to everybody else in the place. There were a few Russian ladies, with magnificent diamonds and prodigiously high titles, with whom they became quite intimate, and in whose charming society, and that of an equal number of their highly distinguished military friends, they enjoyed many very delightful excursions, Mr. Montgomery and Lord Lynberry never failing to join them. On some of these occasions the high-born and highly-married Princess of Fuskymuskoff, a beauty of some years' standing, and not wholly unknown at any continental court, very graciously consented to enact the part of *chaperone* to the whole party, poor Mrs. Roberts not being able conveniently to ride a donkey, and not wishing to walk as far as some of their pic-nickings carried them. In a few other instances they had made acquaintance with ladies who, like themselves, were in the habit of frequenting the rooms and the public walks; but by degrees these, most of them being *slow* English, were dropped again. Two young ladies, indeed, had, with their respective brothers, the honour of being admitted to a considerable degree of intimacy with our distinguished friends; but it is probable that they owed their distinction to their having learned to smoke—an accomplishment which they had not only promised to teach their new friends, but they and their respective brothers taught also the art of manufacturing exquisitely elegant little cigarettes, in a style that was perfectly fascinating to all parties.

One trifling uneasiness presented itself during these halcyon days to the mind of Mrs. Roberts, which arose from perceiving that her intended daughter-in-law not only avoided, habitually, and as a matter of established custom, every sort of intercourse

with her intended husband, but that moreover her intimacy with Mr. Vincent went on increasing in so very remarkable a manner, that she could not help thinking it *might* come to something, notwithstanding Edward's assurances that he did not care a sixpence for it, and that he perfectly well knew how to make Bertha Harrington his wife, let Mr. Vincent like it or not. It was a comfort, certainly, to hear him say this; nevertheless, as it did not quite satisfy her, she determined to speak to Bertha herself; not indeed on the subject of Edward—she did not think it was quite time for that—but on the subject of Mr. Vincent, whose familiar manner of talking and walking with her might be truly stated as having occasioned considerable anxiety to the young lady's self-constituted guardian. To this remonstrance Bertha listened without the least appearance of impatience, and even waited, when Mrs. Roberts had ceased speaking, to see if she had any more to say before she answered her; and when that lady added, "Well, my dear, what have you got to say to me about it?" she replied, "Very little, madam. Indeed, I doubt if it would not be better to say nothing."

"No, pray, my dear, don't say that!" returned Mrs. Roberts, rather reprovngly, "Young people, you know, should always speak when they are spoken to; it is one of the very first rules that are taught. I am sure you must remember it, my dear."

"Then I will say, madam, that being, from unfortunate circumstances, placed at a distance from my nearest natural protectors, I profit with great thankfulness of the accidental presence of one who is sufficiently near to me in blood to make his friendship as valuable as it is agreeable."

"Well, my dear, I suppose it is all very natural that you should think so; but it don't follow, you know, that those who are older and wiser should think just exactly the same," said Mrs. Roberts, assuming a good deal of dignity in her voice and manner; "and I hope you will please to remember who it is who is speaking to you, when I say that in *my* opinion it would be much more proper if you did not walk and talk quite so freely with this Mr. Vincent, who, after all, is but a tutor, you know, if he was twenty times your cousin."

"So well, Mrs. Roberts, do I remember who it is that speaks to me," replied the young lady, "and how perfectly unauthorized is every word which you have taken the liberty to say, that, unless I receive your promise never again to intrude any observations upon an intimacy, the cause and origin of which must of necessity be totally unknown to you—unless I receive this promise, madam, I shall immediately profit by the intimacy you have observed, for the purpose of obtaining advice from the only quarter whence I can at present seek it, as to the best manner of quitting a situation which has become disagreeable to me."

"My darling child! what can you be thinking of?" exclaimed

Mrs. Roberts, becoming exceedingly red. "As if you did not know, my dearest Bertha, that the slightest word from you was always enough to make me do everything you wish ! And besides, I have that perfect confidence in you, my dear girl, that your merely saying, as you seem to do now, that there are good and proper reasons for your being so intimate with your cousin, would be quite enough to prevent my saying anything more to prevent it — to say nothing of my fondness for you, which of itself would be quite enough to prevent my ever alluding a second time to anything that gave you pain."

Miss Harrington bowed rather stiffly in return to this affectionate speech, and walked out of the room. Her deep dislike to every individual of the family of which she had so strangely become a member, seemed to increase with every hour that was added to the length of their acquaintance ; for towards Mr. Roberts, though less detestably absurd than the rest of the family, she could feel no esteem. The weakness with which he yielded in all things to the ill-disguised tyranny of wife, daughters, and son, excited only contempt ; and towards the rest of the family her feelings of dislike were stronger still. And yet, though she kept them in some sort of awe of her by their sordid fears of losing the money she brought, she was far, oh ! very far from feeling that it was possible for her to leave them. There were circumstances connected with her terrible departure from her home, which she never had hinted nor ever could hint to her cousin, though in all else there was not a thought of her heart that she wished to conceal from him. But not a word, not a sigh, not a look, which might indicate this, must ever reach any human being, and least of all her cousin ! Alas ! there were causes enough of family estrangement between them already. Should she add another that might lead, if possible, to still more dreadful scenes than all which had gone before ? Not for her life ! no, not if her life could have been forfeited a thousand times over to prevent it. In short, the situation of poor Bertha was very sad ; and though a buoyant, ardent spirit, elastic in youth, and stimulated by an imagination of no common strength and vivacity, did occasionally bring her moments, and even hours, perhaps, of enjoyment, there were many more during which a melancholy reaction fell upon her, and then it would not have been easy to find an innocent young creature of seventeen more profoundly unhappy.

CHAPTER XXX

TOWARDS the close of this first delightful month at Baden-Baden, poor Mrs. Roberts found her admirable talents for managing the financial concerns of her family rather severely called upon in many ways. In the first place, the eloquent and unanswerable reasonings of her son and daughters had proved

to her, beyond the power of contradiction, that not only all their pleasure for the present, but the greatest portion of their happiness and prosperity during their future lives, depended upon their dining at the *table d'hôte* with the favourite *fast* party, to which they now appeared to belong by prescriptive right, four days out of every week. Now, although Lord Lynberry, Mr. Montgomery, and the two noble friends of the Russian princesses, invariably paid for all the champagne and extra wines which were consumed, Mrs. Roberts found that the paying ready money for the half-dozen chairs so frequently engaged for the use of herself and her family, was exceedingly *troublesome*, to say the least of it; and besides this, the intervening days generally brought a good deal of extra expense with them in the way of preparing for pic-nics. True, again, the wine was always furnished by the same gentlemen; but, even in Germany, hams, chickens, turkeys, tongues, lamb, salads, crawfish, and fruits, cost something—though not so much, “thank Heaven!” Mrs. Roberts observed, “as they did in Leaden-hall-market.” Yet still they did cost something, and so much, in fact, that, had not a very convenient large poultry farmer, willing to sell produce to English *my lords*, on credit, been happily discovered, with an obliging butcher and Italian warehouseman acting on the same principles, the inconvenience would have been considerable. As it was, however, the victualling department went merrily on, and many were the *fast* dinners eaten within the sober shades of the Black Forest during that delightful season. Although there was, for the most part, a good deal of sympathy and happy community of feeling among the members of the Roberts family on the subject of all these fêtes and festivals, there were occasions on which the daily improving Edward seemed inclined to assert the rights of independent manhood, and to estrange himself from the rest of the party. He had, in truth, made an attempt to introduce his admired, or, as he called her, his *adored* Madame de Marquemont, to the society of his family and their elegant friends; but this attempt was effectually checked by that lady herself, who confessed to him, amidst a great deal of very touching agitation, that she was growing conscious of feelings towards him, which she could not endure to expose to the scrutiny of either curious or indifferent eyes. I scarcely need say that such a reason as this could not be combated; and it therefore followed, as a matter of course, that Edward was not always, or even often, of the pic-nic parties—a privation which his mother endured the better, as it exonerated him from the bore of contributing his contingent to the fees for sight-seeing, horse-holding, and the like, which such excursions are sure to bring with them. By degrees, too, Mrs. Roberts discovered that it would be more convenient, for the same reason, to have his father absent likewise; and then came the amiable feeling, that it would be very kind if she stayed at home herself to dine with them. This made it quite unnecessary

to send a large basket ; and the excessive liberality of the Princess Fuskymuskoff, who thus became *chaperon* of the party, soon made it quite unnecessary to send any basket at all ; and from this time forward the pic-nics gained upon the *table d'hôte*, so that a week seldom passed without four of these excursions being arranged.

No country in the world can be more favourable for these pretty variations upon the old air "*Amusons nous*," than the neighbourhood of Baden-Baden ; and during the first half-dozen parties of this kind. Bertha, notwithstanding all her sorrows, enjoyed herself exceedingly. She had new landscapes to look upon, new sketches to make, and her well-beloved cousin William at her side to take care of her, and to make everything look still fairer than it was. But, somehow or other, Mr. Vincent did not like these pic-nic parties quite so well as his young cousin. It was not that he felt himself unhappy, either, for he certainly enjoyed the scenery, admired Bertha's power of rapid sketching exceedingly, and appeared to like the walking about with her in search of subjects, and the sitting down beside her while she executed them, very much. Yet, nevertheless, he said to her one evening after their return from one of these excursions, which she thought the most agreeable they had yet taken, "I am afraid, Bertha, that you will think me a very tyrannical sort of cousin, for I am going to desire you not to do what I believe you like doing better than any other thing within your reach at present. Do you think you shall be able to forgive an interference so little amiable?"

Bertha looked at him earnestly for a moment, and then replied with great simplicity, "I think I could forgive you for anything except your telling me that you would not talk to me or walk with me any more. And do you know, cousin William, I cannot help thinking that it is exactly this that you are going to say," she added, while the colour mounted to her cheeks, and a tear began very visibly to gather in her eye, "for you *must* know that it is what I like best—and certainly I shall think it very unkind."

Vincent coloured too as he listened to her. But the emotion was not caused by his finding in her words any reason for supposing that Lord Lynberry was right in the fears he had expressed for the fair Bertha's peace of mind. It was rather, perhaps, the assured conviction that he was quite wrong, which caused the change in his complexion. Not, perhaps, that the almost destitute Vincent would have wished it otherwise—under the circumstances, it would have been a sin to do so. But whatever the source of the feeling, he mastered it quickly, and replied, "No, dear Bertha, no, it is not that. Could anything make me think *that* necessary, I should be quite as sorry as you could be. On the contrary, however, what I have to say to you will, I fear, sound very like desiring you neither to talk nor to walk with any one but me."—"Indeed?" said Bertha, with a very happy-looking smile.—"Yes, indeed, it must sound very like it ; for the fact is, that I want you to promise

me that you will not go to any more of these pic-nic parties," he replied.—"Oh! if that be all, I can promise it with perfect readiness," she returned.—"And yet, dear Bertha, I am sure you enjoy them greatly."—"I enjoy seeing the beautiful country, and I enjoy drawing in the open air, with you at my elbow to tell me when I am right and when I am wrong; but as to enjoying the parties because they *are* parties—I don't think you suspect me of it."

"That is quite true, Bertha; it would be but affectation if I said I did. And yet I almost wonder, too, that you should not be a little offended at my interference, because I suspect it must appear so very unreasonable to you."

"Perhaps," replied poor Bertha, "I am not offended, as you call it, at your interference, because it is such a comfort to me to know that I still have a relation near me who cares for me enough to interfere about me at all. And besides that, cousin William, I know perfectly well that you would not do this, nor anything else, without having good and sufficient reason for it. And you may be very sure that I shall go to no more pic-nics at Baden."

"I thank you, dear Bertha, for your confidence in me—and I thank you the more because you do not ask for my reasons, which, to say truth, I should not be very well able to give explicitly. I certainly know very little either for or against these Russian people, but yet I think that I am only doing what is right in wishing you not to join any more in their gay doings. I heard them talking yesterday of sending a band of wind instruments to some place in the forest, where they said there was level turf that would do to waltz upon. Now all this might be very pleasant, and perfectly unobjectionable, amongst intimate friends and acquaintance. But the very fact that we do not really know anything about these people is, in my opinion, quite reason sufficient to render it objectionable for Miss Harrington to be thrown into such very familiar association with them."

"Then Miss Harrington will associate with them no more," replied Bertha, smiling; "or, at least, not in such a sort as to involve any species of familiarity."

And Bertha kept her word, in spite of the very strongest hints that Mrs. Roberts could venture to give about its not being right for young people to affect singularity, and separate themselves from their young companions, particularly when they might have the great advantage of being *chaperoned* by a princess.

In the first instance, it is probable that Mrs. Roberts's objection to Bertha's staying at home arose from the being obliged to provide a dinner for her—the tête-à-tête repasts of Mr. Roberts and his lady being upon a very small scale indeed; but a very strong additional objection soon became obvious to her, although she dared not make any open remonstrance on the subject. This new objection to Bertha's constant refusals to join the pic-nics arose from

the manner in which her afternoons and evenings were passed at home. When the Roberts family had been first blessed with the acquaintance of Lord Lynberry, Mrs. Roberts had, in the most cordial manner, expressed both to the young man and his tutor her hope that they would make her pleasant Balcony-room as useful as if it were their own; and, at any rate, that they would always come and take their tea with her. Their doing so, when nothing else was going on to prevent it, had become quite a habit, and it was one of which Mr. Vincent profited without scruple now; treating Bertha precisely as if she had been a younger sister, bringing such books as he wished her to read, and assisting her in her study of German with all the steady perseverance of a professional instructor.

"This will never do, Edward," said the alarmed lady to her son, eagerly seizing a momentary tête-à-tête that she caught with him one morning before breakfast. "If you can believe that such a girl as Bertha, growing prettier and prettier every day, and such a young fellow as Vincent, can go on in the way they do without making love—if you can believe it, I can't."

"How you do delight to plague me about that girl, ma'am!" replied the young man, continuing his search in the table-drawer for a lost glove; "and how many more times will it be necessary for me to tell you, that I don't care the tenth part of a penny whether she fall in love with Mr. Tutor Vincent or not?"

"Then if *you* don't care, sir, I do," replied his mother, with more anger than she had ever evinced towards him during the course of his whole life; "and how many times will it be necessary for me to tell *you*, I wonder, that without her fortune we are one and all of us likely to prolong our residence on the Continent by being locked up in a gaol? Your father says that he can't get at a single penny of principal money without a most horrible loss. Think, then, what it must be to me, Edward, to hear you speak in this light, careless way, about the only thing that there seems left in the wide world to save us! Your father says that he can't give me another shilling for the next month without actually borrowing it or taking it up. And I don't believe there is a shop in the town where we don't owe something."

"I dare say not, ma'am," replied the young man, taking out a small pocket-comb, and currying his little moustache in the glass; "I can answer for a good many of them myself. The taking this great house has proved very convenient in that respect, and so has our intimacy with Lynberry and Montgomery. They have both of them more money, lucky dogs, than they know what to do with—for they neither of them play—everybody knows that, so their credit is first-rate."

"But what has that to do, Edward, with your marrying Bertha Harrington? For mercy's sake, speak to me like a reasonable being! What has that to do with your marrying Bertha Harrington?"

"It has a great deal to do with it, ma'am. It will enable me to go on and keep moving till the proper time comes for me to take her."

"Gracious goodness! how you talk, Edward! It is really enough to drive one wild. Take her, indeed? I should like to know what good it will be to take her when she is the wife of another man?—and so she will be, if you do not look about you a little."

"Mother!" said the young man, raising his voice, "let me tell you, once for all, that I will not be plagued about this odious girl before it is necessary. At this moment I not only hate her, but am passionately in love with another woman, and I will not have my happiness interfered with. That I *must* have her money, I know as well as you do; and have it I will, ma'am, you may depend upon it."—"But, my dear boy, this is dreadfully wild talk. You can't rob her of her money; you can't take it out of her pocket, Edward."—"No, mother, I intend to take it pocket and all. But it must be done at my own time, and in my own way." His mother gazed at him with a look half puzzled, half admiring. "Oh, Edward!" said she, "I do think, considering what a mother I have been to you, that you might take me into your confidence, and tell me exactly what you mean."—"Well, ma'am, I will," he replied, "provided you will give me your promise not to tell my father, nor, indeed, any one else. I may, perhaps, want a little of your assistance when the time comes, so it is as well that you should know it. But, remember, you must swear to mention it to no one."—"Well, Edward, well, I swear I won't."—"Then I will tell you," replied her son, "but upon my soul not even the winds must hear it," and, coming close to his mother, he whispered something in her ear. The colour mounted to her face, and she shook her head, but she smiled, and betrayed no token of displeasure, though for a moment or two she remained perfectly silent. At length she said, "But it will require money, my dear fellow: where will you be able to get ready money from?"

"Where I have got it from before, ma'am. Do you really suppose, mother, that I can go on in such a place as this with nothing but the odd dollars and francs that I squeeze out of you? You are monstrously mistaken if you do. Lynberry, ma'am, will lend me whatever money I want."

"Lynberry!" exclaimed the delighted mother, in a perfect ecstacy of hope and joy, "Lynberry? Is it possible that that dear creature, Lynberry, has lent you money, Edward! Then, thank Heaven! I *am* right, as, I must say, I generally find that I am. Lynberry is in love with Maria, my dear Edward. No young man lends money, you may depend upon it, without having some such motive for it. Well, then, my dear boy, I will tease you no more about Bertha, but trust entirely to you, who, I must in common justice say, have shown in every way that you deserved my confi-

dence. And now, my dear, I won't detain you any longer ; and, indeed, I have enough to do myself, for before we sit down to breakfast I must settle with my darling Maria what she is to do about getting a new bonnet—whether it will be better to go again to the same shop, or to begin a little bill at the one just opposite to us. It is not quite so stylish a shop, but then it may be convenient, so I'll just go—”

And not perceiving that her son had already escaped from her, the happy mother went on commenting on her own admirable contrivances, till she had passed through the door which opened upon the apartment of her daughters.

CHAPTER XXXI.

YET, notwithstanding all these favourable appearances, there were some things that did not go quite well with the Robertses. In the first place, Edward, though for some time fortune ebbed and flowed with him so regularly, that the result was not more against him than the half-dozen napoleons he occasionally got out of Lord Lynberry sufficed to cover, at last seemed to become the especial mark of the fickle goddess's ill-humour ; for, night after night, the red and the black, and the black and the red, invariably changed sides as he changed his bets, and for ever voted against him. After staking his last piece and losing it, he was compelled to whisper to the fair friend (who still faithfully adhered to his side, and failed not to share his luck, whenever, as in days past, it had occasionally brought him in a few pieces—taking care, at the same time, to make him understand that her “odious husband” would kill her, if she ever staked a franc of his money) to her sympathizing ear he was compelled to whisper that he could play no more at present, as he had really lost all his ready money. “Borrow of the croupier,” she whispered in return. “Of the croupier, sweet love ?” he murmured in reply, for they were now upon very affectionate terms together : “of the croupier, Louisa ? He would see me at the devil first.” “Try him, *mon ami*,” she returned ; “we have been such constant attendants here, that for once, at least, I am quite sure that you will succeed.” “I have no more money about me,” said Edward, in his best French, addressing the man with a degree of cool assurance that did infinite honour to his rapidly improving strength of mind ; “lend me a few pieces, will you ?” “How much ?” was the man's equally cool reply, stretching out his hand to one of the little mountains of silver money that stood piled before him. “Oh ! five hundred francs,” said Madame de Marquemont, carelessly. “Yes, five hundred francs,” repeated Edward ; “I certainly do not intend to lose more than that to-night.”

And five hundred francs the croupier handed to him, and five hundred francs the croupier raked back again, within a marvellously

short space of time ; for once only, during the process of thus returning it whence it came, did any bet return to him. Five hundred francs at the gaming-table of Baden-Baden is a very small sum ; but everything is comparative, and to Edward, at that moment, the loss seemed to involve absolute destruction, for where was he to find money to acquit him of the debt he had thus contracted ? And to delay the doing so beyond the following morning, was, in gaming-table language, impossible. He felt exceedingly sick, but rallied his powers sufficiently to say, as he mechanically presented his arm to the charming Madame de Marquemont " I shall be here again to-morrow."

The croupier nodded his head, without suspending for an instant the "*Faites votre jeu*," by the uttering of which he so perseveringly gains his own subsistence, and destroys that of other people. The ill-pleased pair walked away in rather gloomy silence ; and though Madame speedily recovered herself, and invited her companion, when they arrived at her lodgings, to enter with her, as she knew the "brute," her husband, was not at home, he declined it, declaring that he had a devillish headache. The hour was already too late to give him any chance of seeing Lord Lynberry that night, and the decidedly very uncomfortable young gentleman went home and crept to bed, as he had often done before, without any member of the family being aware of the hour of his return. But, late as it was when he went to bed, he was up early enough in the morning to catch Lord Lynberry, as he was in the act of leaving his hotel to take his first morning lounge to the library. The audacity of Edward Roberts was certainly increasing every day ; he nevertheless felt a disagreeable dryness in his throat, as he prepared himself, for the fourth time within three weeks, to ask his noble friend to lend him money. But *it must be done*—and, making a strong effort to speak in his usual tone of voice, he said—

"*A propos*, my dear lord, will you have the kindness to lend me five hundred francs more, which I shall be able to pay, with the seven hundred and fifty I have had already, in a day or two, when my father expects to receive money from London ?"

Lord Lynberry was as generous, thoughtless, good-natured a young fellow as ever lived, and really felt so much positive pleasure in doing a kindness, as to render the act of refusing very distasteful, nay, even difficult to him ; but, to say truth, he was beginning to get tired of the Roberts' concern altogether. The first compliance with Edward Roberts's request for a loan of money was part and parcel of the foolish frolic for amusing himself with the family, of which he was now repenting ; and the repetitions of it arose from want of firmness enough to enable him to say "No," where he had before said "Yes ;" but now his mood was changed, and he almost felt as if he were atoning for some of the folly he had committed before, when he replied to the above demand by saying,

"You must excuse me, Mr. Roberts, I really cannot do any more for you in that way—it would be inconvenient to me. Good morning to you."

The unlucky Edward felt exceedingly offended at receiving this rebuff, and turned abruptly away, with an air of as much lofty indignation as if he had been refused assistance in some great and glorious enterprise to which he had devoted himself. Something else, however, must be done, and done immediately; and the sort of desperate conviction of this which rushed upon his mind gave him the necessary energy of seeking his father and mother, whom he was determined to attack together, with the assurance, unmitigated by any vain ceremony in the manner, that he must have a pretty considerable sum of money, and that directly.

"The thing may as well be done at once," soliloquized the young man, as he directed his steps towards the Balcony House. "I know perfectly well that I shall have to pay for all the things Louisa has bought, when she has made me go with her to the different shops—so I had better ask for the whole together—I must ask for two hundred pounds; less would be of no use to me." Having thus screwed his courage to the necessary pitch, he ran up the stairs with rather a more rapid and decided step than usual; and, throwing open the door of the room where the family were assembled at breakfast, he felt comforted at being addressed by Agatha with a reproach for being so late.

"We have all quite finished breakfast," she added, "and I don't believe there is any coffee left."—"Never mind the coffee, I don't want—I mean I have had my breakfast already; and if you girls have finished, I wish you would all bundle away. I want to speak to the governor and my mother"—"A very polite style of sending us out of the room," said Maria; "but have the goodness, before we obey, to tell me if you have seen Lord Lynberry this morning?" "Yes, Maria, I have; and now begone, or I will beg him never to dance with you again."

The young lady then departed, with a glance and a nod, sufficiently indicative of the degree of value which attached, in her estimation, to any attempt at separating from her the devoted Lynberry. The two other girls had preceded her in silence. The anticipations of the father and mother respecting the nature of the communication they were about to receive differed widely. The mother had no doubt whatever that her accomplished son was about to make a bold demand for "ways and means to carry on the war," as he was wont facetiously to describe his wants; while the father, greatly less enlightened as to the real state of affairs, confidently anticipated some interesting intelligence concerning the progress of his matrimonial alliance. This idea put the good gentleman into such high spirits, that, contrary to the usual family custom, it was he who spoke first when the door was shut and the conclave opened.

"You are quite right, Edward, to let us know how things go on

from time to time; and I hope, my dear boy, from your lively manner, that you have now got something pleasant to tell us. Miss Bertha is a shy sort of a girl, I fancy, and not so easily brought to say 'YES' as some might be, but I don't think, when all's said and done, she will have much of a chance against you, Edward, eh?"

"Bertha Harrington is queer-tempered enough, sir," replied the young man with a sneer, "but, like all the other girls in the world, she will find her master, sooner or later. It is not about her, sir, however, that I now want to talk to you; once for all, I am ready to pledge my word to you that she shall be my wife, and that at no very distant time. And that there is no joking or folly meant when I say this, my mother can tell you as well as I, for she knows more about it than most people."

"And very right and proper she should, Edward. She is the very best of mothers, and the very best of managers; and a son that would not confide in her would be altogether undeserving of the name," said the worthy gentleman.

"All true, sir. And now, if you please, we will come to what I have to say at present. I must have money, sir, and that directly—and what I dare say you will consider as a pretty considerable sum; but if I do not get it all, the fat will be in the fire, I promise you; and there will be an end of my marriage, which is as certain as if we had been before the parson already—ask my mother else—but there will be an end, once and for ever, to that, and for all hopes about the girls into the bargain."

Poor Mr. Roberts became very red in the face, and looked at his wife, who knew as well as he did (excellent manager as she was) that he had drawn his account for interest with the bank in London as dry as his drafts could make it, and that the last five-francpiece he had in his pocket had gone the day before to pay for the mending of a pair of boots. There was a silence of about a minute, which at last was broken by Edward, who, finding his courage rather increase than diminish at sight of his father's dismay, said, rather sternly than humbly,—“Well, sir, will you please to give me an answer? Is my name and character to be blown from one end of Baden to the other, or will you advance me two hundred pounds?"

Mrs. Roberts started when she heard this sum named, for it exceeded, at least tenfold, the amount of the demand she had expected. But Mrs. Roberts was too good a manager not to have long ago decided in her own mind what must be done, if any particular circumstance rendered it absolutely necessary for them to get hold of something beyond their income in order to get on. She started, certainly, at hearing Edward say so coolly that he must immediately have two hundred pounds; but it instantly occurred to her, nevertheless, that it would be a monstrous good thing to have the first difficulty got over respecting this first drawing upon capital. She knew well and practically, that "*c'est le premier pas quicôte*," and, the system once begun, she felt as confidently assured that success

would attend all her schemes as Napoleon did when he decided upon his invasion of Russia. The marriage of Edward with Bertha she had her own private reasons for believing as certain (to use her own phrase) as anything on this side eternity could be. That of Maria and Lord Lynberry, her common sense (she said) told her was little less so; and as for that of Agatha with Mr. Montgomery—who they had lately had the indescribable satisfaction of discovering was the Honourable Mr. Montgomery, and of whose engagement to his cousin, Lady Charlotte, Agatha had not thought it either necessary or proper to say anything—as to that very splendid connection, Mrs. Roberts could not permit herself to doubt. Could she then—could Mrs. Roberts, blessed as she was with a strength of mind not to be shaken by trifles—could she permit herself to be terrified and driven to abandon such glorious hopes, because a little extra money would be wanted to carry them through?

She waited for the first emotion which the words of Edward had produced on the mind of his father to subside; but when at length she heard him draw a long breath, and utter the words, "God bless my heart and soul!" she addressed him thus:—"My dear Mr. Roberts, you look as frightened as if Edward had told you that the house was on fire, or that his sisters had eloped with two tinkers! I am sure I shall be as sorry as you can be, if the dear boy has been guilty of any imprudent extravagance, though, mixed up as he is at present with the first rank of European aristocracy, it must be very, *very* difficult indeed, poor fellow! to keep perfectly within bounds. But it is quite time, my dear Roberts, that we should have a little serious conversation together on the unexpected situation in which we find ourselves; and I am very well pleased that Edward should be present at it, because, in fact, the subject concerns him even more than it does us. You must be aware, my dear Roberts, that our situation is at this moment vastly higher, an immense deal higher, you know, as to our rank in society, than ever it was before, or, to say the honest truth, than we any of us ever dreamed it would be. Now, this is not to be done for nothing. I never pretended to be a fairy; and nobody that was not like Cinderella's godmother could be expected to transmogrify a banker and his family, who were just ruining themselves by straining and striving to live in Baker-street, into people of first-rate distinction at the most fashionable watering-place in Europe, and that without paying for it. Such things may be done easily enough in a fairy tale, but not out of it; and I should be sorry to think that you were so behindhand in intellect as to expect it."

"No, no, my dear, no, no," said Mr. Roberts, "I never did expect it, I do assure you; but only you know my not expecting it will not make me one penny the richer, nor one bit the more able to let Edward have the two hundred pounds he talks about."

"This is no time for joking, sir," returned his wife, knitting her

brows into a very awful frown ; “ we are now talking of business, and of the future destiny of the family, and I must beg that you will not talk nonsense if you can help it.”

Mrs. Roberts really was, in her own particular line, a *very* good manager. She knew that her husband could sometimes resist pretty toughly, on points of finance, when he was in a courageous mood ; but she knew also that a little sharp brow-beating was very apt to disable him, leaving him pretty much at her disposal, to goad or to lead as she might find most convenient. And such was the case now, for this injunction not to talk nonsense if he could help it made him look as meek as a lamb.

“ In short, my dear,” she resumed, with an encouraging kindness of manner which showed that she did not intend to scold him if he behaved well, “ in short there is but one way. At the present moment poor dear Edward must see what he can do in the way either of borrowing, or putting off for a few days these claims upon him. His affairs, I can tell you, will be very satisfactorily settled, and at no very distant day, exactly in the way we most wish. But in the mean time you must write to have a power of attorney sent out to you instantly—without losing a single post, remember. Of course you will appoint the same good plodding soul who has done all our business for us since we have been away, and this power of attorney must enable him to send out to us whatever money we may want to draw for from the capital in the bank. We need not draw a penny the more, you know, because we make this arrangement. What we must have, we must—there is no good in talking about it, but mere weakness and folly, and nothing else ; and I am sure I need not tell you, Roberts, that I am the very last woman in the world likely to persuade you to spend a single farthing beyond what the welfare of your family demands. We are certainly making a great effort for our dear children, and I rejoice to tell you, my dear, that they are all of them likely to be so settled in life as to give them the power in after years of proving to us the gratitude they feel. They are excellent children, one and all of them ! and it rarely happens, I believe, that parents, in making this sort of exertion for the good of their offspring, can see the reward for it so close before their eyes as we do.”

Mrs. Roberts then intimated, by a glance of her eye to Edward, that he might as well be off ; and glad enough to escape both questionings and counsel, he obeyed, full of admiration for his mother, and exceedingly well satisfied by the new regulation as to money matters which she had so ably achieved ; for the pen was already in the worthy Mr. Roberts’s hand, with which he was to make this praiseworthy effort for the good of his family ;—but a little anxious, nevertheless, as to what he should do to pacify his friend the croupier during the days which must of necessity intervene before this effort could produce its first results. In tolerably good spirits, however, notwithstanding this temporary difficulty—

for the young Edward saw a very easy future opening before him—he immediately repaired to the lodgings of Madame de Marquemont, whom he was sure to find alone at that hour, and made the intelligent Madame de Marquemont perfectly understand that his present distress was only temporary ; and when he mentioned that he had already asked for two hundred pounds, which demand he meant to double when the power of drawing was fully established, she dismissed him with the assurance that she would undertake to say a word to the croupier, and that she was quite sure he would not only wait patiently for the trifle he had already lent, but willingly advance more, if they liked to try their luck again before the money came.

This was precisely all that Edward wanted to complete his happiness. He had rather a mysterious feeling of dread of the croupier, who appeared to him a sort of high-priest presiding over the most awe-inspiring rites which he had ever witnessed.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE satisfaction of Mrs. Roberts herself at the peaceable and perfectly satisfactory result of her interview with her husband was scarcely less vivid than that of her son. She was aware, perhaps, rather better than even the young man himself, of the absolute and immediate necessity of enlarging their means of obtaining money ; for she knew, with vastly more accuracy than he did, how many different shops, farms, and market-women she owed money to ; and this knowledge, joined to the maternal responsibilities which rested upon her for his bills and the young ladies' bills too, had made her for some time past very far from easy in her mind as to the present, notwithstanding the unspeakable delight with which she contemplated the future. But now she saw her way clearly before her. Confident in the success of her plans—conscious and proud of the talent and the conjugal influence which she was sure would enable her to attain that success, Mrs. Roberts was at that moment one of the very happiest and most perfectly well-satisfied women in existence.

So great were the hallucinations produced by the novel circumstances in which she found herself, that she as completely lost all sense of her true position, as a child does after turning round and round and round till he is giddy. None but a looker-on, and one, too, quite at leisure to observe what is passing around him, could fully comprehend, or, perhaps, fully believe, such a state of mind to be possible in any one of healthier mental capacity than an idiot ; yet it is most assuredly the fact, that a monomaniacal disorder of the judgment, amounting in degree to that here ascribed to Mrs. Roberts, may be perpetually seen to beset individuals who have been suddenly transported from a sober middle class of English society into the midst of the puzzling mosaic of a continental

watering-place. It is all very well for Russian generals, Polish princesses, German barons, French dukes, Italian marquises, Swedish counts, &c. &c. &c., with all their fair and noble belongings (mixed up with a few English *milors*)—it is all very well for these to rush about from one favourite place of amusement to another, sparkling in diamonds, and stars, and broad-breasted *rateaux* of decorations innumerable. It is all very well for them. They understand one another perfectly. There is no delusion, no dazzling deception in the case. But woe to the unlucky third-class English gentleman and his family, who, bringing with them nothing but English gold and English beauty as tickets of admission to the noble phalanx—woe to him and his, if he or they thrust themselves into the vortex, and fancy they can spin round in it unscathed like the rest! What the others look upon as the amusement of an hour, they contemplate as the most important epoch of their lives. And important it often is to them, Heaven knows! rendering them utterly and for ever unfit for the station in life in which they were born and bred, without affording a gleam of reasonable hope that they shall obtain any other one hundredth part as good.

It is probable that Agatha saw something in the countenance of her mother, as she left the scene of the conference which has been described in the last chapter, that led her to believe the present moment would be favourable for discussing a little business of her own.

"I wish you would come into our room for a moment, mamma," said she; "I have something that I want to show you."—"And what's that, my dear?" replied her mother gaily. "But let it be what it will, I am ready to see it."—"I don't believe you will admire it much," muttered the young lady, as she led the way to the sleeping apartment of herself and her sister. On reaching it, Mrs. Roberts perceived that the bed, and most of the chairs, and other articles of furniture, were covered with a variety of wearing apparel, bonnets and shawls inclusive, which spoke more plainly of past gaiety than of present neatness.

"Just look at all these things, ma'am, if you please," said Agatha, putting herself into a sort of stiff and stately attitude, with her arms crossed before her. "Perhaps you remember, ma'am, what I said to you some time ago on the subject of *consistency*. I wish you would have the goodness to recall it to your mind now, as I think it might be useful in assisting you to make up your mind as to the propriety or impropriety of our pretending to continue in the brilliant circle of society in which we move at present. How do you suppose the Princess Fuskymuskoff will relish my continuing to appear with her, arm-in-arm, upon the public walks, in such a bonnet and mantle as this?"

Mrs. Roberts took up the bonnet, which she placed upon her finger, turning it round and round, the better to examine it on all sides.

"Upon my word, Agatha," she said, with a pleasant smile, "if I had never known that you were a very handsome, elegant-looking girl before, I should know it now. It really is hardly possible to believe that you have actually been wearing this horrid thing—and yet, positively, looking like a well-dressed girl of fashion all the time! You certainly must be beautiful, child."

"It matters very little how beautiful I may be, ma'am," replied her daughter, "if I am forced to appear in such dresses as these. I will not scruple to say it, for I don't see any reason why I should; but I do think in my heart, that unless you and papa find some means to enable us to dress decently—I don't speak of myself only, observe, but of Maria also, whose two silk morning dresses I cannot look upon without feeling myself colour to the very ears—I say, ma'am, that unless you and papa do find out some means of clothing us decently, we shall both of us have a right to consider ourselves as having been most abominably ill-used."—"Well then, please to listen to me, Agatha," began Mrs. Roberts; but she was not permitted to proceed.—"I beg your pardon, ma'am," said her eldest daughter, holding up her finger to stop her, "I really beg your pardon, but I do beg you will not begin to answer till you have heard what I have got to say. I have gone on silently for some time past, in the hope from day to day that you would say something yourself about the necessity of leaving off these faded, worn-out things. But no! day after day passes on. You hear us invited by ladies of the very highest rank to join them in parties to which they go as elegantly dressed as if they were going to Longchamps; while we have nothing to wear that their waiting-maids would not have thrown away long ago. The agony of appearing before the eyes of these illustrious ladies, dressed so disgracefully, is bad enough—but it is by no means of this that I the most complain. The cruelty of the privation is felt ten million times more in another direction. You cannot be ignorant of the fact, ma'am, that Maria has inspired a young nobleman of high rank and enormous fortune with a passion likely to lead to the most gratifying results—I say nothing of myself—I wish to say nothing. My destiny, perhaps, is as yet less plainly marked out; one thing concerning it is, however, assuredly certain, namely, that I have formed intimacies—let me rather say friendships—here, which will for ever render it impossible for me to submit to any association with persons not of exalted rank—whether I marry or whether I live single, my doom is fixed in that respect. It is possible that I may die, mamma; that I may die before your eyes, if the admirable management by which you have contrived to introduce us to the very first society in the world, should fail now,

and oblige us to conceal ourselves from the eyes of all we love and value upon earth ! This is possible—but it is *not* possible that I should ever again consent to be taken into such society as we were introduced to formerly. *This* I never will endure. No ! not if the only way of escaping from it is by suicide !” And here the young lady ceased, striking her fair forehead with her open palm in a manner which betrayed very strong emotion.

Among several other very remarkable talents, Mrs. Roberts possessed that of being able to whistle, one single note at least, loud, shrill, and long. She availed herself of this talent now, and produced the sound above described with so much strength and perseverance, that both her daughters applied their hands to their ears, exclaiming, as by common consent, “Oh ! don’t, mamma ! don’t !” Mrs. Roberts, however, ceased not till her breath failed her, which was not soon ; and then, recruiting herself by inhaling at leisure as much of the necessary material as sufficed to display another of her varied talents, she first burst into a hearty laugh, and then said, “Well, my dear, I hope you have had a great deal of pleasure in hearing yourself talk, which, indeed, I cannot doubt, because it was a fine speech, Agatha, particularly the latter end of it—but if, instead of a pleasure, it happened to be any trouble, you might have spared it, and lost nothing ; for if you had been pleased to condescend to hear me out when I began to speak, you would have known, lots of time ago, that I had been thinking of your bonnets and shawls, you foolish children, quite as much as yourselves, and perhaps a little more to the purpose, Miss Agatha. For though it never came into my head that I had better kill myself for want of a smart bonnet, I hit upon something that I think will do quite as well, though perhaps it won’t make such a good story in the newspaper. But never mind, Agatha, you need not look so terribly solemn because I laugh at you a little. Tell me, dears, at once, what it is that you most want, and I will tell you in return, that it shall be bought, and paid for too, without losing a moment of time from the first part of the job to the last.”

“Oh ! my dearest, dear mamma !” exclaimed Maria, letting fall a much worn dress that she had been holding ready to display, and throwing her arms round the maternal throat, “how can I ever thank you enough for saying so ? I feel quite sure that my beloved Lynberry would be faithful to me if I wore the dress of a beggar-girl ; but yet I won’t deny that I have suffered dreadfully from appearing in his eyes such a poor, penniless creature as I have done. The Princess Fuskymuskoff is so exquisitely elegant, you know, that it is quite impossible that he should not see, and feel too, poor fellow ! the dreadful contrast.”

“I am indeed thankful, ma’am,” said the elder Miss Roberts, “that we seem to be redeemed from the horrible condition in which my father has chosen to keep us, for I must do you the justice to say, that I believe the fault has not been yours. It is

quite evident that your ideas upon the means necessary for sustaining a distinguished situation in society are greatly more enlightened than his—poor dear gentleman!” While pronouncing the last three words, Agatha seemed, with some little effort, to throw off the tragic vein in which she had been indulging during the former part of the conversation, and it was almost in a gay accent that she continued: “And now, mamma, I must beg you will tell us how you have managed it. A short and easy method for bringing a stingy old gentleman to reason may be a secret worth knowing.”

“I hope and trust, dear girls, that you will both of you make such marriages as will render all such secrets unnecessary—for I can tell you that the business is far enough from being a pleasant one. As to *how* the thing was to be done, you know, admitted neither of question nor answer. The business lay in an egg-shell. There was but one way of getting out of the scrape, and *that*, of course, he was obliged to take, whether he liked it or not. When income won't do, the fund that comes next, you know, is capital, and a trifle from that *must* be taken to enable us to turn this corner. But I beg you to observe, both of you, that my firm intention is now, as it ever has been, to practise the very strictest economy in all things. Let your husbands be ever so rich, my dears, depend upon it that a well-regulated system of economy will never do you any harm. I myself have always been rather celebrated among my friends and acquaintance for my excellent management in everything relating to money matters, and I should grieve to think that any daughter of mine should be deficient in a talent upon which I certainly do a little pride myself. I know perfectly well, dears, that you must be made decent—that has always been, as you must be aware, my first object; and the second is, as you know equally well, to do it with the greatest possible economy. I myself must have a new dress, and a new summer bonnet and cloak, immediately. I am excessively sorry for it—but it is impossible to help it, and, as the old adage says, what can't be cured must be endured.”

“That is quite true, ma'am,” replied Agatha; “I declare to you, I very often wish that it were possible to go naked—or, if not quite without clothes, on account of modesty and all that sort of thing, I do most truly and sincerely wish that fashion did not oblige us to put on so many expensive and perfectly useless things as we do. We should look a monstrous deal better without them.”

“That is so like you, Agatha!—you dear odd creature!” returned her mother, laughing. “But now, my dear girls,” she continued, putting aside some of the faded finery which encumbered a sofa on which she prepared to place herself, “now let us talk a little of our dear good friends, Lynberry and Montgomery. I hate plaguing my girls about their lovers, as some mothers do,

but I should like to know a little how matters go on. You feel quite certain, my dears, don't you, that these two charming men are really attached to you?"

"Can I doubt him? Oh! is it possible to doubt such a being as Lynberry?" replied Maria, pressing her hands upon her heart, to still the tumultuous throbbings which this mention of his name occasioned. "You see how devoted he is to me, mamma," she resumed, "and, oh! what a monster of suspicion must that woman be, who could suffer herself for an instant to doubt the truth of a passion that has been proved a thousand and a thousand times over by every demonstration that the tenderest love can devise."

"Heaven forbid, my dearest Maria, that I should try to make you suspicious, particularly towards the man who so evidently intends, some day or other, to become your husband! Poor, dear, excellent young man, I am sure I love him already as if he were my own son!" And here Mrs. Roberts was so strongly affected by the tender words she had herself uttered, that she put a finger in her eye to remove a tear.

"No, Maria," she continued, "I don't doubt his faith or his constancy for a single moment; nevertheless, you know, I should not be at all sorry to hear that the offer was made, because, just in the humour that I have got your father into at present I think one might be able to coax something handsome out of him in the way of wedding-clothes; but he has not spoken quite out yet, has he, Maria?"

"No, mamma, he has not," replied Maria, with a sort of firmness which arises from feeling that the truth we utter has nothing in it from which we ought to shrink. "No, mamma, he has not; but if you will take my opinion—and I certainly *ought* to know something about it—I should say that, if papa is really in the sort of humour you describe, it would be exceedingly wrong indeed not to profit by it."

"There is great good sense in what Maria says, ma'am," observed Agatha, "and if you really have the power of getting hold of money now, and do not profit by it, you will have nobody but yourself to blame for it, whatever misery may come afterwards."

"That is all very true, Agatha," returned Mrs. Roberts, "but yet I don't think I should quite like to ask your father for an additional hundred pounds or so, to buy wedding clothes, unless I was pretty tolerably sure that they would be wanted; so I think I will wait another day or two before I speak about it, Maria."

"You must do as you please, ma'am," said Agatha, with a frown, while Maria relieved her wounded heart—wounded by the injurious doubts of a suspicious mother—by shedding tears. "You certainly must do as you please," resumed Agatha, "but I confess I think you are wrong, very wrong indeed."

"Well, I will think about it again, my dear, before I decide,"

said Mrs. Roberts, in return to this remonstrance, adding, though not without a little tremor in her voice, for she was beginning to get a good deal afraid of her elder daughter.—“And now, Agatha, do tell me a little how you and Mr. Montgomery get on together. He is a most remarkably charming man, and I am ready to declare any day that he shall have my fullest consent, if he proposes for you, although I know perfectly well that he is only the son of a nobleman, and not a nobleman himself, like our dear Lynberry ; but that shall make no difference, not the least, and you could not say anything that I should like to hear better, Agatha, than that he had proposed, and that you had accepted him.”

“I must desire, ma'am, once for all,” replied the young lady, “that you will not give yourself any trouble about my concerns whatever. I am perfectly capable of taking care of myself, and I must insist upon it that my friendships, whether male or female, are left wholly and entirely to my own management. I consider the friendship of her Highness the Princess Fuskymuskoff as a most important epoch in my destiny ; and having once found myself the chosen friend and confidante of such a woman, one of the most illustrious in Europe, it can hardly be expected that I should submit to be called over the coals, and examined like a school-girl, as to what either the men or the women of my acquaintance may choose to say to me. Be satisfied, ma'am, with my assurance, that I will take very good care of myself ; and when the time comes, whether it be early or late, that I have anything, either concerning myself or anybody else, which I may think it necessary for you to hear, you may depend upon it that I shall communicate it. And now, if you please, I should recommend that we should go shopping—I cannot go to the pic-nic to-morrow without a new parasol, new boots, new gloves, and, most of all, a new bonnet. Perhaps, ma'am, Maria and I had better go on to Hombert's by ourselves, as I know we have both of us a great deal to do, and you can follow us when the carriage comes.”

Mrs. Roberts did not venture to make any objection to this arrangement, and the two young ladies set off together, inexpressibly relieved by the liberal permission they had received to make purchases, and happy in the harmony of feeling which produced the mutual avowal, that if there was a bore in the world more detestable than all others, it was the having a mother who chose to busy herself by interfering in her daughters' love affairs.

CHAPTER XXXII.

It was within a week after the events and conversations above recorded, that Mr. Montgomery, upon receiving a letter from his cousin, strongly urging his not returning to the neighbourhood of their capricious aunt till the time fixed for their marriage, accosted his young friend Lynberry, on the public walks, with the

following abrupt question:—"Well, Lynberry, are you ready to start for Rome? I have had enough of the baths and the bathers. What say you?"—"Say?" repeated the young man. "I will echo your words, Montgomery—I have had enough of the baths and the bathers."

"Well, then, tell Vincent so—I am not quite sure, by the way, that I shall find another echo in him. But he is such an excellent fellow, and so thoroughly unselfish upon all occasions, that I am positive he won't wish to keep you here merely to please himself; and, upon my soul, I don't think there is anything more to be seen or said here, particularly necessary for the progress of your education."

"I suspect he thinks so too," replied Lord Lynberry; "and, though I believe most sincerely that his beautiful cousin is in love with him, and that, consequently, it is utterly impossible he should not be in love with her, I am sure he will be ready to set off the moment I tell him that I think we had better go; and it will be capital good fun travelling together, Montgomery. When do you think you shall start?"

"This is Tuesday, is it not?" returned Montgomery. "I know of nothing which need detain me beyond Thursday or Friday at the very latest; and to tell the truth, I don't wish for any particularly long leave-takings,—do you?"

"No: my heart is so tender that I could not stand it," replied Lord Lynberry. "Where is Vincent, I wonder?"

"Giving Miss Harrington a lesson in drawing, either in the forest yonder or in the Murgthal," said Montgomery. "How marvellously true is the proverb which says, 'One may steal a horse, and another may not look over the hedge!' If one of our dear friends—for example, one of the enchanting Robertses—were seen deliberately tucking herself under your arm, or mine, for the purpose of wandering away for hours, tête-à-tête, among the mountains, I suppose it would be considered, notwithstanding their particularly *fast* ways, as rather an extra breach of decorum; yet this little creature does it every day of her life with Vincent, and I don't believe it has ever entered the head of any one to fancy that there was anything wrong in it. Is this prejudice and partiality, or only truth and justice?"

"Only truth and justice, Montgomery," returned the young nobleman, "and that sort of self-evident truth, too, which the dullest must see, whether he will or no. If one of the Robertses were invited to make such an escapade, and could find an opportunity to do it, when they thought nobody was near enough to see, they would be sure to look sneaking, if they did not feel shy; but this little creature, as you call her, looks about her with an air not only innocent, but proud, and evidently glories in what she is about."

Yes; and that pride, by the way, is in truth the *mot de*

l'énigme," said Montgomery, "for it acts doubly. In the first place, the pretty creature is evidently proud in having found a gentlemanlike cousin to take care of her; and in the second, she is proud, and with equal reason, of her own young courage, in so frankly taking advantage of it."

"I believe you are quite right, Montgomery," returned Lord Lynberry; "you really seem to have studied the young lady's character very profoundly."

"No; those who run may read it," replied the other; "and I own to you, that had I not been in love before, yea, and heartily too, I should scarcely have escaped the fascination of her beauty and her originality combined. She certainly is very lovely, and shows well too, from the marvellously strong contrast which she forms with everything around her. I really wonder, Lynberry, how you have escaped? I thought you were caught at first, but lo! you suddenly veered about, and fell at the feet of a very different idol."

"I have no fancy for being second-best, Mr. Montgomery," replied his young lordship, colouring. "I could, perhaps, have discovered and appreciated the real character of Miss Harrington as accurately as you have done, but I had no wish to contest the fair lady's smiles with my tutor, and threw myself at the feet of the idol you mention, expressly to keep myself out of her way; and, false idol though she be, she has served to save me from offering incense at a shrine too unpropitious to make worship at it any sign of wisdom."

"Quite true, Lynberry. So now hie thee to thy philosophical tutor, and inform him of our wish to move on. If he makes any objection, the very slightest in the world, I shall suspect him of being more like other mortals than you seem to suppose."

"Vincent will make no objection," replied the young man.

"We shall see," said Montgomery.

The result proved that the young nobleman knew his tutor well. Vincent did *not* make any objection, but declared on the contrary that he thought Lord Lynberry quite right in wishing to get to Rome.

But, notwithstanding this very perfect self-command displayed in the promptitude with which Mr. Vincent set everything in action to facilitate their immediate departure, the sensations produced by the necessity which his duty imposed on him of immediately quitting Baden-Baden were so acutely painful as for the first time fully to awaken him to a knowledge of his real condition. Then, and not till then, did he become aware that the young girl over whom he had been watching with all a cautious brother's care had become dearer to him than life—dearer than everything that life could give, save the consciousness of uncompromising honour and rectitude. It is not to be supposed, however, that his hired service as a tutor to Lord Lynberry would have been felt by him

as a tie sufficiently sacred to interfere with all the happiness of his life. Had this been the only impediment to his devoting himself to Bertha during every hour of his future existence, his good judgment, energy of character, and promptitude of action, would speedily have removed the difficulty. But, alas! this obstacle, when compared with others which existed to divide him from his young cousin, was as an ant-hill to a mountain. His father was a ruined man, and he, therefore, of necessity, was a ruined man also. Bertha was an heiress. Could he then take advantage of the circumstances in which he had found her, and which inevitably tended to give him, in every way, value in her eyes, in order to win her affection, and so become possessed of her wealth? He could not do this. Dearly as he loved her, he could not have consented to gain her at that price, and he thanked Heaven that the same moment which showed him the extent of his danger showed him also the way to escape it. Had he indeed understood more thoroughly how matters stood with her, he might in some degree have acted differently; but of the terrible and mysterious circumstances attending her mother's death he knew nothing. Greatly as she appeared to take pleasure in talking to him of times long past, when he had been known to and fondly beloved by her mother, she shrank with such evident agony from every allusion to more recent events, and especially from all that related to her mother's death, that he was not only totally ignorant of every suspicion respecting it, but also of the abrupt manner in which Bertha had been sent from her home, and of the powerful reasons which prevented her entertaining any hope of returning to it. Had he known all, he might have thought, and thought justly, that the immediately becoming his wife would be the best course she could adopt. But, as it was, he bent all his meditations upon the best manner of saying farewell, without betraying to her all the misery it cost him. He well knew that she would miss him sadly—he well knew that the protection her family had so strangely chosen for her was not such as he could leave her in with satisfaction; but no thought that her sorrows would be increased in any other way by the degree of regard she felt for him mixed itself for a moment with his anxiety. And in truth he was right. Bertha had no more idea that she was in love with her cousin than that she was in love with the sun, or the moon, or the Alt Schloss, or any other of the good things which gave flashes of happiness to her existence, in spite of all she had to make her miserable. Mr. Montgomery was quite right when he said that the poor bruised and mortified Bertha felt proud at having found a gentlemanlike cousin to take care of her. And she not only felt proud of this, but she felt proud of being proud of it; and often, when laying her head upon her pillow, and remembering the satisfaction, the delight, perhaps, with which she had listened during the day to some counsel or some brotherly instruction from him, she thanked

Heaven that in spite of the degradation of her present circumstances, the spirit of her mother was still sufficiently alive within her to make her cherish what was great and good, notwithstanding all the lowering associations to which she had been exposed, which might have lessened her value for it. In short, had she loved him at all less, she would have been ashamed of herself. All this was genuine, and so easily read in her words, her looks, and her manner, that Vincent was spared the additional agony of believing that the never-to-be-forgotten pleasure he had enjoyed in her society had been purchased by her peace of mind.

He was, for a moment, a little startled by her turning very pale, as she listened to the announcement of his departure ; but this impression wore off as he listened to her earnest entreaties that he would write to her—write to her very often, and always tell her what she ought to do, and particularly when she asked his advice, which she assured him she should do upon all important occasions. This was so little like the language of a young lady in love, that it reassured him ; and they parted to all appearance as an affectionate brother and sister might have done.

As to the feelings of the two Miss Robertses upon hearing of the departure of Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery, they cannot be described at the fag-end of a chapter.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was after a dinner, perhaps a little less animated and delightful than usual, at the *table d'hôte*, and while the Roberts family, and the three gentlemen who were their constant attendants, paraded up and down the portico before the rooms, that the purposed departure of the latter was announced. Miss Harrington, indeed, had been informed of it during her usual morning's walk with her cousin, but was not conscious either of any inclination or duty that obliged her to increase the ordinary scanty intercourse between herself and the Roberts family by communicating it. The dreadful news, therefore, was as unexpected as it was terrible ; yet it was communicated with such easy gaiety of manner as happily enforced the necessity of concealing for a moment the far different feelings with which it was received.

"How dreadfully I missed the dear princess at dinner !" exclaimed Agatha. "She certainly is the most fascinating creature in existence. I wonder we don't see her ! She positively promised to join us here before this time."

In order to watch for the approach of the fascinating princess and her *cortège*, the different *tête-à-têtes* into which the party usually divided themselves were suspended, and they all stood in a group together on the steps. The observation of Agatha was therefore heard and replied to by her sister, who said, rather fretfully

—for Miss Maria did not like standing all together in a group,—“It is very provoking indeed; I wish she would come! It is such a bore standing here waiting for her; besides, I want to know what she has decided upon for to-morrow. A pic-nic is to be the order of the day; but her highness seemed undecided between the Murgthal and the mountains. Which shall you like best?” she added, looking tenderly into the eyes of Lord Lynberry.

“Alas!” exclaimed Montgomery, coming forward to the assistance of his more embarrassed friend; “alas! It matters little what either Lynberry or I may prefer, for Vincent, cruel fellow! has fixed upon to-morrow for starting with his lordship, and I have promised to travel with them.”

Agatha started, and the sort of little convulsive movement which this communicated to the hand that rested on Montgomery’s arm, made him for an instant feel rather ashamed of himself; but Maria groaned aloud, and, relaxing her hold of Lord Lynberry, she seemed about to fall. But the young lordling’s heart was growing hard, and he made a movement so plainly indicative of his intention to let her go if she liked it, that she suddenly grasped him much tighter than ever, and, after repeating the groan in the most touching manner possible, softly whispered in his ear,—

“Oh, heavens! Is this true?”

“Yes, indeed, I am sorry to say it is,” he replied, producing, for decency’s sake, something like a sigh. “Vincent says that my father has fixed this time for our going to Rome, and of course, you know, I must obey orders.”

“Oh yes! of course,” re-whispered Maria, with a softer sigh. But happily her heart was at that moment saved from breaking, by remembering that other people might go to Rome as well as Lord Lynberry. Nevertheless, the moment was a very awful one, and she naturally found it necessary to support herself, by leaning her trembling form against that of her too dearly loved supporter. Lord Lynberry was very kind, however; and, as he pressed her hand in his, as he was a good deal in the habit of doing when they were walking together, she mentally exclaimed,

“All hope is not over yet.”

Nay, the trembling weakness of her limbs had so much effect upon him, that he, on his side, mentally exclaimed, “I might be taken in now, if I were plain Dick Archdale!”

Yet, after all, perhaps the emotions of Mrs. Roberts were the most vehement; for, as usual, in addition to her own tremendous disappointment, and to all her maternal sympathy for the disappointment of her daughters, she had before her eyes the dread of what was infinitely more painful to her than all the rest—namely, the having to confess to her husband that she was mistaken, and that she was not at all points the very best manager in the world. Happily, however, for her too, a thought arose in this

moment of extremity, which enabled her so far to recover herself as to avoid all public display of her emotions ; and it was with an admirable degree of self-command that she said, loud enough for all the party to hear,—

“ I am truly sorry to find that we are to part so soon, my dear friends, but at any rate I hope we shall pass this last evening happily together at the Balcony House. Let us walk for half an hour or so in those beautiful shady walks yonder, and then we will go home to tea. Shall we ? ”

“ I am sure it will give us the greatest pleasure,” replied both the gentlemen at once, both perhaps feeling equally well pleased at being thus permitted to slip off the scene, without being visited by any very vehement display of regret from any of their admiring friends.

During the time occupied by this abrupt discovery, Mr. Vincent and Bertha were very composedly conversing at the distance of about three yards from the rest of the party ; and Mrs. Roberts having received the above-mentioned amiable acceptance of her invitation, turned about and walked towards Bertha and her cousin, and said, in her most polite and amiable manner,—

“ I am so sorry to hear, my dear Mr. Vincent, that you are all going away ! I am sure I don't know what the Baths will do without you. You have all three been such an ornament. However, my dear sir, I hope you won't refuse what the other two gentlemen have granted, but that you will come this last evening to drink tea with us at the Balcony House.”

Whether invited or not, Mr. Vincent would undoubtedly have sat beside his cousin on that evening till her usual early hour of retiring to rest ; he replied to Mrs. Roberts's invitation, however, very civilly, and declared that he should wait upon her with great pleasure. PLEASURE ! Poor young man ! Amidst all the violent emotions awakened in the various bosoms of the party by the approaching separation, there were none—no, not even in the bosom of Bertha,—that could approach in vehemence to those which wrung his heart. Bertha had a feeling at the bottom of hers, that she was fearfully independent of every one in the whole world. This feeling, which a short time ago had been one of very bitter misery, was now full of consolation. Her father had forfeited, had abandoned, all right to control her, he had thrown her off upon utter strangers, or rather he had thrown her altogether upon herself ; but now she no longer felt abandoned and alone in the world. Heaven, in its mercy, seemed to have sent her as a protector the only relative she had whose name she had heard mentioned by her mother's lips with love and esteem ; and the idea that she was to lose him by the separation which was now about to take place, was as foreign to her mind as to that of a child who sees its father take his hat and walk out of the house upon a matter of business. And thus, while the heart of Vincent was wrung with the doubt

whether he ever should see his pretty Bertha more, she was pleasing herself with the anticipation of the exceeding pleasure she should feel when they should meet again, and with the thoughts of the perfectly new delight she should enjoy in writing to him and receiving his letters. In fact, of all the party about to be left in possession of the vaunted Balcony House, she was the only one who felt disposed to thank Heaven for having permitted her to enter it.

"I suppose we may walk on into the shrubberies, my dears," said Mrs. Roberts; "I don't think that it is any use waiting for the Princess Fuskymuskoff. She so seldom keeps any engagement of this kind, you know."

"I must beg you, ma'am, not to find any fault with the Princess Fuskymuskoff," said Agatha; "she is the friend I most value upon earth."

This was spoken *avec intention*, as the French call having a meaning for what they say, and was doubtless said for the purpose of causing a pang to the perfidious Montgomery. Whether he felt all that it was intended he should feel might be more doubtful. However, he once more presented his arm, which was once more accepted; and the party moved on, every one of them, excepting Bertha, endeavouring to appear to feel either more or less than they really did; and not one of them, perhaps, excepting Bertha, being much deceived by the efforts thus made. But as for her, poor little girl! she had no more idea of the deep and hopeless anguish which was wringing the heart of her companion, than of the fervent and unchangeable love that was nestling in her own. And next to Bertha, the least uncomfortable of the party, perhaps, was Mrs. Roberts, for she had great faith in the influence of leave-taking on the hearts and the lips of young gentlemen, when walking side by side with such girls as hers; and, besides that, the moon was come round to the full again, and the balcony was as pleasant to sit in as ever. And who could tell what might happen yet, before it was time for everybody to go home and go to bed?

CHAPTER XXXV.

THIS last balcony hope proved as unsubstantial as the moonshine which had assisted its creation. The young ladies threw open the windows, and the young gentlemen, upon being invited so to do, walked through them, but a marvellous change had come over their spirits since the first evening on which the experiment was made. The Miss Robertses both felt that these last moments were very precious, and, like their mamma, they thought also that they might be profitable; and, therefore, not even when their wishes and their will had been the most steadfastly fixed on the acquisition of a new ball-dress, in the distressing times before

drafts upon capital had been thought of, not even in those resolute and trying moments, had they ever more strenuously exerted themselves to obtain what they wished than they did now.

"I know not what ails me," said Maria; "I feel as if this room had not air enough in it to permit my breathing. Oh, see how beautifully the moon is rising over those acacia-trees! Let us look at her once more."

And, having opened the window with her own fair hand, she stepped forth into the balcony. Lord Lynberry followed, of course but it was with a very different step from that with which he had formerly obeyed the same invitation.

"I should so like a chair, my Lord," she resumed, after they had silently stood side by side for a minute or two; upon which his lordship returned into the room and brought one out to her. "And will not you sit down too?" she said, rather plaintively. "Are you afraid of the fresh air to-night?"

"Oh dear no! not the least in the world," he replied, and as he spoke he walked to the very farthest extremity of the balcony, as if to prove that the fresh air might blow upon him as much as it liked. Maria sat still for about a minute and a half, with her eyes, which she knew were very handsome eyes, raised with a sort of softly reproaching expression to her friend the moon. And what that friend thought of her and her eyes it is impossible to say, though she looked down upon her very steadily in return; but as for her other friend, for whom the attitude and the look were certainly in part intended, there was sad reason to suppose that he was not thinking of her at all, or which, perhaps, under the circumstances, was worse still, that he wished her to suppose so—for he had turned his head as decidedly as possible the other way, and appeared anxious to reconnoitre some object only visible by his leaning forward so as to look quite round the corner of the house. Maria saw it—saw it all, notwithstanding her steadfast contemplation of the moon, and she thought that there might be more ways than one for accounting for his "altered eye." The glance that took not half a second, sufficed to show her that there was something forced and artificial in the manner in which he looked away from her, and another half-second was long enough to give birth to a thought which explained it. It was his tutor who was taking him away. It was Vincent who was thus tearing them asunder, and it was doubtless some vehement remonstrance from the young man's father which now induced him to make these terrible, these supernatural efforts to avoid an explanation with her. A most bright and lively little family of new-born hopes were produced between the glance and the thought. Maria started from her chair, and followed him. As his lordship had reached the extreme boundary of the balcony, he could retreat no further; and when Maria gently laid her hand upon his arm, heaving at the same time a profound sigh, he felt that there was nothing left for

him but to take her hand in his and to sigh too. This was quite as it should be, and Maria began to recover her "peace of mind," which a few minutes before she had had very serious thoughts of telling him he had destroyed for ever. But now she changed her purpose. Everything was perfectly intelligible. The poor dear fellow was suffering as much as she was, and not for worlds would she have uttered a word that might pain him !

"You will not forget us, Lord Lynberry, when you see the moon rise again, though over far distant scenes?" said she. "I will not think that you can forget us, when you know so very well that we can never forget you."

His young lordship was very tender-hearted ; and though he thought all he had said about Miss Maria to his tutor, and perhaps a little more besides, he could not stand these gentle words unmoved ; and, if the truth is to be told, his arm encircled her waist as he replied, "No, my dear Maria, it is quite impossible that I should ever forget the many happy hours I have passed with you."

Maria was moved to tears, and for a few moments could not speak ; and so, as she stood perfectly still, his lordship's arm was not removed. And he, too, was silent ; a circumstance which she interpreted, poor young lady ! (as many other poor young ladies have done before her) in a way as far removed as was possible from the truth ; for, whereas he was silent solely because he had nothing to say, she thought it was solely because he had too much—too much for his timidity—too much for the harsh command of his most noble but most cruel father, to permit his uttering. But this state of things could not go on for ever—they were both of them aware of this. So Maria began to sob ; and Lord Lynberry, as if desperately determined to bring it to an end at once, caught her in his arms and kissed her. And then some considerable time before it would have been possible for her to have summoned strength sufficient to extricate herself from his embrace, he relaxed his hold, and saying, in an accent of great alarm, "Take care, my dear girl, we are watched !" he hurried back to that portion of the balcony upon which the windows of the drawing-room threw a light. For Maria to follow at that moment was totally out of the question. Her feelings quite overpowered her ; and had she not seized hold of the iron railing, she must, she was quite sure, have fallen. Meanwhile he entered the drawing-room in rather a hurried manner, a circumstance which Mrs. Roberts remarked with very particular satisfaction ; and having extended his hand for a parting shake, he exclaimed, "Good bye, my dear Mrs. Roberts. It is very disagreeable to say good bye, isn't it ? But there is no choice, is there ?" and then adding, "Come along, Montgomery !" he ran out of the room and down the stairs in a way that left a great deal of hope behind him. The circumstance of his not taking leave of Agatha, who was still standing in the

balcony with Montgomery, was thought by Mrs. Roberts to be quite decisive, and showed the poor young man to be in a state of agitation, which left him without the power of knowing what he did. But here, too, there was room for more interpretations than one. That he *was* agitated is certain; but perhaps this might arise quite as much from his fear that he could not get away fast enough, as from any suffering arising from going away at all.

Meanwhile, Mr. Montgomery and Agatha were preparing themselves for the separation which had been announced, for which purpose they, too, had retreated to the balcony. The scene which ensued between them there differed a good deal from that which was passing between Maria and Lord Lynberry. In the first place, Mr. Montgomery's embarrassment—for he, too, certainly was embarrassed—was of a different nature from that of his young friend, and had in it a much larger mixture of self-reproach. Lord Lynberry knew that he had been guilty of insinuating, if not of absolutely declaring, a great deal more love for the young lady he was about to leave than he had ever felt; but his conscience was rendered pretty tolerably easy under this self-accusation, by his conviction that the love he had given was of just about the same worth as that which he had received—the chief difference between them being, that her ultimate object was to make him marry her, and his to take care that she should not succeed; so that, on the whole, he felt that when the leave-taking was, once for all, done and over, he should set off again, not only heart-whole, but pretty nearly self-acquitted of all blame.

But in the case of Mr. Montgomery matters were different. In the first place, he knew that he had no right to make love at all, being affianced both in fact and in feeling; and, moreover, he could not suspect, like Lord Lynberry, that the flattering partiality so frankly made visible by the lady proceeded from any hope on her part of obtaining an advantageous marriage by means of persuading him that he had gained her affections. He could not suspect this, because he had himself most distinctly informed her of his engagement. He felt, therefore, that whatever degree of partiality he had inspired was quite disinterested, and therefore that he ought to be most particularly grateful. Yet somehow or other it was not so. On the contrary, he felt angry and provoked, both with her and with himself. Partly from vanity and partly in sport, he had permitted the sentimental friendship she had talked about to assume at least the appearance of love-making; and this it was which now made the easy and elegant-mannered Montgomery feel embarrassed.

But Miss Agatha Roberts was rapidly becoming one of those strongly-pronounced and independent characters, who make up their minds to "care for nothing," but to take that position in society which pleases them best, without doubting for a moment the power of their own talents to obtain it. Something of

this sort Mr. Montgomery suspected. But he did not quite understand Miss Agatha. He did not fully understand her master-passion. She herself would have called it ambition ; and such it was, perhaps, but of a very queer kind. Her ambition was to be what she called a woman of fashion, *coûte qui coûte*. For this end she had consented to smoke, though the doing so made her dreadfully sick. For this she preferred receiving the attentions of the engaged Montgomery to those of any other man at the Baths, however free—for Montgomery was a man of fashion. She had been shocked a good deal at first hearing of his sudden departure ; but, the brain being a tougher organ than the heart, she came to this farewell conference in the balcony without any intention of being pathetic. Mr. Montgomery soon perceived this ; and it was so great a relief to him, that all his embarrassed feelings disappeared, and with them a good deal of the contempt he had felt both for himself and her. So that, excepting for the fact that no one was looking on to witness the flattering intimacy with which he treated her, this parting interview was as gratifying to her feelings as any she had ever had with him.

"I shall miss you terribly, my dear friend !" said she, in very much the tone in which a French marquise of Louis le Grand's day might have addressed one of her *cortège* of lovers, when sending him off upon a campaign ; "but depend upon it I shall not forget you—nor can I hope to meet with many friends in future so well calculated to make the idle hours of life pass pleasantly."

"You are too kind, my dear Miss Roberts," he replied.

"Nay, call me Agatha," said she. "You have often done so, you know, and I like it. It is a sort of landmark or mile-stone in the journey towards friendship. And indeed, Montgomery, you must let me class you as a friend."

"You cannot, I am sure, doubt my wish to do so," he said, but with rather less warmth than she expected ; for she knew that she was letting him off very easily, considering all their philanderings, and she thought the least he could do was to declare himself her faithful friend for life. But, in fact, the notion of Lady Charlotte's being present at some future day, when the charming Agatha, with her outrageous ringlets, her prodigiously puffed petticoats, and her three-quarters *décolletés* morning dresses, might seize upon him with the licensed grasp of eternal friendship, came across him at that moment with something like a shudder. However, her rejoinder gave him courage, and during the remainder of the interview he was very affectionate.

"Alas !" said she, "it is grievous to think how very little chance there is that we should speedily meet again. You will be returning to England to fulfil your engagement. And as for us, Heaven only knows where we shall be ! The whole race, you know, look up to me ; and, as I know I shall guide their movements, whether

I intend it or not, I think it not unlikely that we may visit every court in Europe before we return to our English residence."

"Such unlimited power of locomotion is very enviable, my dear Agatha," he replied, rejoicing exceedingly at the enlarged sphere of action she was proposing for herself; "and if I am doomed, as I think I may be, to parliamentary shackles after I marry, I must console myself with thinking of my fair friend's more extended field of enjoyment."

"Do so, Montgomery; and you may think, too, that in all her wanderings she will never have forgotten you. And *à propos* of that, my dear friend, I hope you will sometimes let me know that you have not forgotten me—not that I mean to propose *une correspondance suivée* with a man who is about to marry a woman I don't know—I am too discreet to think of it, I assure you. If she were a particular friend of my own, it would be different—but as it is, the thing is quite out of the question. You shall never have cause to fear my discretion, Montgomery. What I mean to ask of you is, that you will give me—give us, I mean, of course—introductions to any people of real high fashion that you may know upon the Continent. What I am chiefly anxious for is, to increase my acquaintance with foreigners of distinction, wherever I may happen to be. Such a friend as the Princess Fuskymuskoff is invaluable! As to introductions to English ladies, unless they are persons of really high rank and fashion, and who have got a little out of the musty-fusty humdrum of our odious country, I will not trouble you by asking for any introductions to them. But I shall be obliged—we shall all of us be really very much obliged—if you would present to us, by letter, any young men of fashion and fortune whom you may happen to hear of setting off upon a continental excursion. I need not tell *you*, my dear friend," she continued, "that I say this with no missish view to forming matrimonial connections. I detest the idea! I declare to you that, for myself, I care not a straw whether I marry or not. I cannot endure the idea of making marriage the most important business of life. We all know that the majority of men and women do marry, and therefore, of course, the chances are that we shall do so, like the rest of the world—but as for fixing one's thoughts eternally upon it, I neither will nor can do it."

Mr. Montgomery assured her that he thought she was perfectly right; but there was something of vagueness both in his eyes and his accent as he said this, which left his fair companion in doubt as to what he meant. She looked at him, as in the days that were gone, with a prodigious deal of mysterious sentiment, stealing, as it were, from her eyes to his.

"Ah! Montgomery! I should like to know what you are thinking of at this moment!" said she. Upon which, strange to say, Mr. Montgomery actually blushed, or, in more fitting phrase, he coloured—for his thoughts at that moment were wholly and solely

occupied upon the question of how soon he could decently go away, and retreat to his lodgings and his bed—for he had been busy all day, and was heartily tired; not to mention, that of all things in this mortal life, there was not one which he considered to be so dull, stale, and utterly unprofitable, as the unmeaning fag-end of an unmeaning flirtation. Nevertheless, he roused himself to the performance of the tiresome task which his folly had brought upon him, and said, looking as handsome and melancholy as possible, “My thoughts, my dear friend, were occupied upon the detestable necessity of saying adieu. But alas! it must be done.”

“Not till you have promised to do what I have asked,” said Agatha, who in truth was thinking on her side much more of her future career than of the present parting. “Will you not, my dear friend, promise to give me this proof of the sincerity of your affectionate regard? I really feel that I deserve it, Montgomery; for nothing can have been less selfish, or more sincere, than my conduct and my sentiments towards you.”

This was said in a very imposing manner; and it did impose in one sense, though not in another; that is to say, it influenced, but did not cheat him. It would indeed have required a monstrous deal of eloquence to persuade him that the fine clear bold eye that was now raised to his face expressed any sentiment in the most distant degree allied to disinterested affection of any kind. Few men understand the characters of the ladies with whom they flirt so nearly as Mr. Montgomery did that of Agatha Roberts. He was perfectly aware that she was a cold-hearted, calculating, ambitious schemer, with vanity enough to desire greatly, nay, passionately, a distinguished place in society, and shrewdness enough to perceive that she had no chance of obtaining it in the ordinary way, and must therefore arm herself for the enterprise by a steadfast resolution that nothing should stop her, and a confident hope that if she could not get on in one way she might in another. Her pretence of simple-minded friendship, therefore, he valued exactly at its proper worth; but nevertheless he did remember that, such as she was, he had condescended to select her constantly as his partner in the dance, as his companion on the promenade, and, in short, as the object of all the attentions which he had made it his amusement to pay during the banishment to which he had been condemned; while her present lofty tone reminded him also of the obvious fact, to which indeed it was her especial object to allude—namely, that the generality of young ladies, under similar circumstances, would have tormented him with insinuations that he had used them ill. He at once determined therefore to comply with her request, to which perhaps he was the more inclined by perceiving that the doing so might be made the means of bringing this parting interview to an immediate conclusion.

“Most willingly do I promise what you ask, my dear friend,” he

replied, "and I am very glad you have thought of naming it before it was too late to prove immediately my wish to obey you. Heaven only knows where I may be, or what may become of me, nor even how soon I may be recalled—I mean, how soon I may be obliged to go back to England. The only way, therefore, in which, as it strikes me, I can be really useful to you, is by going home immediately, and writing half a dozen letters or so, before I go to bed, to various friends of mine, who I know are at this time amusing themselves by wandering about the continent. You will be sure to meet them somewhere or other; and I am sure they would all be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Thank you, my friend," replied Agatha, in the tone of one who receives what he knows is his due, but who condescends, nevertheless, to express gratitude for it. "I thank you, dear Montgomery," she resumed, "but remember that I do so in the belief that your letters will be addressed only to such persons that I should wish to know. You understand me. I certainly shall not thank you if you put me in the way of being disgusted with the society of Englishmen who are not of high rank, or who have not thrown off their detestable national stiffness."

It was at this moment that Lynberry, rushing through the drawing-room, had exclaimed, "Come along, Montgomery!" whereupon the gentleman so addressed eagerly replied to Agatha's last speech by declaring that he understood her perfectly, and would take care to give her no introductions but such as she would wish to have.

"But, my dear friend," he added, "if I am to write at all, I must go directly. God bless you, dear Agatha!" and, gallantly saluting the tips of her fingers, he too rushed through the window into the drawing-room, where, with all his usual irreproachable perfection of manner, he offered his hand to Mrs. Roberts, who seized upon it with a grasp that under other circumstances might have been mistaken for a hostile and resolute method of detention; but it was now clearly understood by Mr. Montgomery to mean only a mark of strong affection, strongly expressed. While this grasp still lasted, he uttered an elegant phrase or two, upon his regret at quitting Baden while so charming a family as hers remained in it, and then tore his hand away with the appearance of considerable emotion—and vanished.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

ALTHOUGH each one of the Roberts female trio had very resolutely made up her mind not to betray the slightest symptom of disappointment or surprise at the sudden departure of the gentlemen whose presence had shed a brightness so much beyond that of ordinary German sunshine upon Baden-Baden, they certainly did look, in spite of all they could do to prevent it, rather blankly

on each other, as they met in a sort of triangle, face to face, when the two daughters entered by the two windows, and met their mother, who was coming forward to advise them not to catch cold, but to come in directly.

"Well! I am sure," began Mrs. Roberts in gentle accents, which seemed to promise a good deal of lamentation.

"I shall go to bed!" said Maria, rather abruptly, "for I am tired to death."

"Do, my dear, do," replied her mother; "it will do you good—more good than anything, take my word for it; and I will send you a little good strong white wine whey, my dear, and then perhaps you will get to sleep, love."

Maria felt a little angry, but still more pathetic; and feeling that if she remained she should certainly begin crying, which she particularly wished to avoid, she hurried out of the room. But as she was passing through the door, the idea of the white wine whey seemed to comfort her, and she half turned round and said "If you please, ma'am; thank you."

Mrs. Roberts rang the bell and gave the necessary orders—that is to say, she desired that "*une pint du lait*" should immediately be put upon the kitchen fire, adding that she would "*descendre en point de tout de tems pour faire ce que était necessaire.*" And then, the servant having departed, poor Mrs. Roberts hoped to indulge herself in a little consultation with her eldest daughter, upon recent events and the present state of their affairs; and was beginning with her usual phrase, "Well, Agatha," when that young lady abruptly stopped her short by saying, "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but at this moment I really cannot listen to you, for—"

"Oh! my dear girl," replied the tender mother, interrupting in her turn, "don't say a word about it; I don't feel in the least offended. It is so natural, my poor dear child, that you should wish to be quite quiet after it all. We will talk it all over to-morrow, Agatha. Would you like, my dear, to have a little whey brought you, like Maria? A pint of milk will make plenty for you both, and I am sure it would do you good, Agatha."

"Mercy on me, ma'am! I trust you are not going to treat me as if I were a love-lorn girl like Maria. If she chooses to fall sick about every man she meets in society, she must do it: I am sure I shall never interfere to prevent it. And you may give her whey, if you like, with plenty of sugar and spice to comfort her. My scheme of existence is a different one. I flatter myself I shall never give you any trouble about my love affairs; and in return I must request, ma'am, that you never torment me about any of the persons, either male or female, to whom I may happen to attach myself. I am quite willing to pledge you my word that my family shall never be exposed to the danger of any low associations on my account; and, moreover, that if it should ever happen that I found myself likely to be induced to form a matrimonial engagement, I

would give you and the rest of my family timely notice of it. And now, ma'am, I won't detain you from Maria and her whey any longer; but I should think you had better advise her not to *promener* her woe too publicly. There are a good many pleasant people still left at the baths, whatever she may think of it, and I should be sorry to see her wipe her eyes upon them all. For my part I shall console myself by putting on my cloak and smoking a cigarette in the balcony."

The young lady, as she uttered these words, passed by her mother to seek the luxury she spoke of, and Mrs. Roberts looked after her with mingled pride and admiration.

"Well! thank Heaven!" she fervently exclaimed, "my unceasing efforts for the good of my family have not all been thrown away. That dear girl will repay them all! What a mind!—what manners!—what a walk she has! That is a daughter that any woman might be proud of; and I have no more doubt of her making a splendid marriage, than that I stand here. But she must set about it in her own way, that's plain enough—and so she shall, dear creature! Such a girl as that is not to be treated like an everyday miss, who would rather catch up the first penniless 'prentice she could find, than not be married at all. I wish that poor dear Maria had some of her admirable strength of mind! I should not be obliged to go broiling over the kitchen-fire if she had!"

But notwithstanding this somewhat harsh-sounding reflection, Mrs. Roberts performed the maternal office of comforter so effectually, that Maria speedily fell asleep, the last words she uttered as she closed her eyes being, "Good night, mamma! We will talk it all over to-morrow."

And when the morrow came, it found Mrs. Roberts early awake, and anxiously awaiting the moment for Maria to be awake too; for these parting words had sent her to bed with the delightful conviction that, after all, there was something to tell; "and if there is," she murmured, as she cheerily rubbed her rosy hands after washing them, "and if there is, let it be as little as it will, I shall know how to make the most of it." But it was in vain that the anxious mother lingered on the outside of the breakfast-room, determined that, the moment Maria approached it, she would take her to some quiet corner, and hear all she had got to say before she met the rest of the family, however much they might clamour for their breakfast. But not all her watchfulness nor all her patience availed to obtain her object; sorrow and white wine whey combined caused Maria to sleep much later than usual; and when at last she did make up her mind to leave her bed, there was a sort of sullen languor in all her movements, which rendered the business of dressing too long for the patience of poor Mr. Roberts to hold out; and when he exclaimed, in a tolerably loud tone of voice, "I don't want the rest of ye to have any breakfast if you

don't like it, but I must and will have my coffee directly," the disappointed mother gave way, and took her place at the table in a state of the most torturing uncertainty. Nor when at length, quite at the conclusion of the meal, Maria entered, and took her usual seat, could the acute maternal eye discern any symptom by which she might guess whether the "*all*" that was to be talked over contained a history of weal or woe. Luckily, however, she was not doomed to endure the torture of uncertainty much longer—the silent breakfast ended, Mr. Roberts and his son walked off, and Miss Harrington retired to her room.

"Now then, my dearest Maria! The time is come, isn't it, for us to talk it all over, as you promised me last night? You will not put it off any longer, will you, dear love? What is it that you have got to tell me, my darling Maria?"

"I have very little to tell you, ma'am, as to the past, but there is a good deal that I wish to say about the future. How soon, ma'am, do you think of leaving Baden-Baden?"

"How soon? I have never begun thinking, as yet, about leaving it at all—I don't mean, of course, that I have any notion of staying here for ever. It does not seem to me as if any people of fashion really lived here; but everything has been going on so very pleasantly till just now, that I never turned a thought towards going away; and besides, you know, we have engaged the house for ever so long, and we must stay till our time is up."

"I see no sort of necessity for that, ma'am," said Agatha. "It would be a monstrous bore indeed if people were obliged to stay in a house whether they liked it or not, merely because they had taken it. It would be positively turning one's house into a gaol."

"But what is one to do, Agatha?" said Mrs. Roberts, looking greatly dismayed. "You know as well as I do that we pushed things pretty far when we took such an expensive house; and just think what your father would say if we were to go away and leave it before our time was up, having to pay for it, of course, all the same. What do you think he would say to it, Agatha?"

"Upon my word, ma'am, it would be a great deal too much for my nerves if I were obliged to divine what my father would say upon that or any other subject that was proposed for his consideration; but, fortunately, we have the comfort of knowing that it does not signify what he says. I am happy to say, ma'am, that you have too much *savoir faire* to suffer yourself and your family to be led about blindfold by any old gentleman in existence."

Mrs. Roberts was evidently a good deal touched by this compliment, but she looked a little frightened too; and after she had nodded and smiled, to show that she was not at all angry—a liberty indeed which she had quite ceased to take with her eldest daughter—she said, "But what would you propose to do about the house, my dear Agatha, if you had the management of it all quite in your own hands? You don't mean that you would go

and hire some other house, and still be obliged to go on paying for this all the time? You don't mean that, I suppose, do you?"

"Really, ma'am, if I had to manage the business, I should consider a few weeks' rent of such a little place as this as a matter of very little consequence. I dare say the house might be very easily disposed of, if that were all. If it suited my convenience to leave the house, I should leave it. The first object for every rational creature being, of course, the placing themselves exactly where they would best like to be; and having decided upon going, if such were my pleasure, I should next take measures to dispose of the house for the remainder of the time for which we have taken it; but as to sitting down in it to keep watch over the goods and chattels, I should as soon think of proclaiming myself a pauper and going into the poor-house at once."

"You need not say so much about it, Agatha. It is not at all likely that mamma means to do any such thing," said Maria.

"I assure you, Maria, I have no idea that she has any such absurdity in her thoughts. I merely answered a question, you know," replied Agatha.

"Don't let us talk any more about the house now, girls," said Mrs. Roberts, coaxingly. "I am positively dying to hear what dear Maria has to tell me about what passed last night."

"Impossible, ma'am," replied Maria, casting down her eyes, and appearing to be in some confusion. "It is quite out of the question, I do assure you. If you would give me the whole world, I am certain I could never bring myself to describe to you every particular of what passed last night."

"I am sure, my dearest love, I would not ask you to enter more into particulars than was pleasant to you, for anything that could be offered to me. I have a great deal too much respect for your feelings, Maria, to do any such thing," said Mrs. Roberts; "but you may easily guess, my dear, how excessively anxious I am to hear the upshot of what passed between you and Lord Lynberry last night; because, of course, one must consider *that* to be pretty nearly decisive, you know."

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I know no such thing," replied Maria.

"Then he did not say anything to you at all, Maria?" said her mother, looking most deplorably disappointed.

"What can you mean, ma'am?" replied her daughter, knitting her brows a little in the style of her elder sister. "What can you mean, ma'am, by saying that he did not say anything to me at all? Gracious Heaven! as if the recollection of such an interview was not agitating enough, without the torture of being told that he said nothing!"

"How foolish it is of you, Maria," returned the puzzled parent, "to fancy that I meant to say that he actually said *nothing*. No, no, Maria, I am not so old, my dear, but that I know better than

that. What I meant to ask, Maria, was whether he said anything at all approaching to an offer of marriage? Do give me a straightforward answer to this question, my dear, will you?"

"I really do suppose, ma'am, that you are the first person in the world who ever did ask for a straightforward answer upon such a subject!" exclaimed Maria vehemently, clasping her hands, and raising her eyes to heaven. "Straightforward, ma'am? Gracious Heaven! what a phrase!"

"Indeed, ma'am, I must say that I think you press Maria very unkindly," said Agatha. "I really think that under the circumstances the only fair question would be, whether he has given her reason to believe that he is still attached to her."

"Well, then, Maria, let me ask you that, will you?" said her mother. "Tell me, my dear, did he give you reason to believe that he was still attached to you?"

Maria gave her mother a look, that seemed intended to say a great deal, though Mrs. Roberts could not tell what; and then, spreading her two hands over her face, she exclaimed, "Oh heavens! Yes."

"Then, my dear child, I feel satisfied," replied Mrs. Roberts, "perfectly satisfied, Maria. I would have preferred, certainly—I will not deny it—I would have preferred his declaring his intentions to me or to your father before he left the place—I certainly should have preferred it—but it is impossible, I know, to have everything just exactly as we would wish; and thankful I am, and thankful I will be, at the constancy of his passion. But yet, my dear girls, don't you think yourselves, that there is something very odd in his going away so abruptly, without giving me the very least hint in the world that there was any chance of our ever meeting again? Now don't fancy, my dear Maria, that I doubt your word. On the contrary, my dear love, I feel perfectly sure and certain that you feel convinced of his tender attachment, but —"

"There is no but about it, ma'am," said Maria, interrupting her; "I am not such a baby but that I know how a man behaves when he loves a woman. And I do beg that I may not be plagued any more about it."

"I am sure, Maria, any notion of plaguing you is the furthest thing from my thoughts. I am quite sensible, my poor dear child, that the more you are convinced of his love, the more the parting must be painful—one must have the heart of a tiger to plague you just at this time—so don't you take any notice of what we are talking about, but I should just like to ask Agatha what she thinks. You have a monstrous deal of observation, Agatha—nobody can deny that—and I wish you would tell me now, quite confidentially, as one friend might speak to another, what do you think about it?"

"About what, ma'am?" said Agatha, raising her eyebrows.

"About Lord Lynberry, my dear. Do you think, from what you have seen yourself, and from what you have heard your sister now say, that we may expect his lordship to propose for her? Now speak plain and clear, Agatha, and let me understand you," returned her mother.

"Upon my word, ma'am," replied Agatha, "you have desired me to do the most difficult thing in the world. How can any one speak *plain* and *clear*, as you call it, upon a subject so notoriously intricate as the heart of man? Besides, I really must be excused from passing any judgment on the question. Nobody, in fact, can do this but Maria herself—for you must be aware, ma'am, that the very truest love is often that which conceals itself the most carefully from the public eye. But though I will not pronounce a judgment, I may give an opinion, and that opinion is, that, in examining this matter, you should take care to keep in mind the rank and station of the young nobleman in question. It is obvious to common sense, that we are not to expect precisely the same straightforward conduct from him that might be looked for from a person exactly in our own station. Don't mistake me, however; I use this phrase solely with reference to the old gentleman his father, who having, unluckily for him, been born in the last century, has conceived himself, and possibly given to his son, or at least attempted to do so, some of those old-fashioned prejudices which make station depend rather on birth and fortune than on fashion. We know better, I hope; we know that once admitted within the magic circle of *TON*, everything else is forgotten. That, of course, as far as society is concerned, is all that is looked for—is all that is at all important. But in affairs of marriage, I am afraid these noblemen of the old school are still apt to make a ridiculous fuss about birth and connection. *Nous autres* may laugh at all this, for we know how utterly absurd it is, and it is probable, from the choice he has made, that poor dear Lynberry knows it too. But this, you will observe, may not be sufficient to prevent his having some trouble with his father. I should not be at all surprised if he had a good deal."

"Yes!" cried Maria, clasping her hands and lifting her eyes to heaven. "Yes! that should account for everything! In fact, it does explain everything, and makes what otherwise might be puzzling as clear as light! And therefore, mamma, I hope and trust that you will not let any nonsense on papa's part prevent your doing what you ought to do. Remember that the happiness of my whole life depends upon it; and if you refuse, I am doomed to misery—or rather let me say, to *DEATH*! Yes, mamma, to an early tomb! For I know and feel that I have not strength to survive it!"

"Survive what, my dear?" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. "What is it that you say will send you to an early tomb? Oh! Maria! how very shockingly you do talk."

"What is *talk*, mamma? What is talk, compared to action? If you do not do your duty by me now, you will have to weep over my early grave!"

"But what is my duty, Maria? For Heaven's sake explain yourself! You terrify me to death, and then won't even tell me what you want me to do."

"You shan't have reason to complain of that long, mamma, for I have not the least objection to telling you what I want you to do; for I know it is reasonable, and I know it is right. All I ask is, that you should immediately take measures to leave this hateful place, and follow Lord Lynberry to Rome. I am quite sure that in his heart he expects that we should do so, though he was too delicate to say so. *He* is obliged to go, poor fellow! for such are the orders of his tyrannic father; but I, thank Heaven, am free—Lynberry knows this, and therefore must of course expect that I should follow him."

"Follow him, my dear!" said Mrs. Roberts, relapsing for a moment into the *rococo* decencies of her former mode of life. "I know very well that, as Agatha says, things are not exactly as they used to be. But still, somehow, I do think the notion of all setting off and following this young gentleman to Rome has something very queer in it."

"Queer!" cried Maria, with violent emotion, "what a word to use at such a moment! My life is hanging upon a thread, and you call it queer."

"Upon my word, ma'am, I must say that I think you are very unfeeling," said Agatha. "If you choose to refuse the perfectly reasonable request of Maria, you certainly might do so without making a joke of it. I see plainly that it is likely enough that her happiness, poor girl! may be sacrificed to your detestable old-fashioned notions; but at any rate there is no need to add insult to tyranny."

"How you do run on, Agatha!" exclaimed her mother, looking as angry as she dared. "You know perfectly well that I am as far from wishing to part Maria and Lynberry as you can be. And if you can explain away the oddness of our all setting off after him the moment he is gone, I shall be very glad to listen to you. There! I am sure I can't say anything fairer than that, can I?"

"I don't see any great fairness in it, ma'am," replied her eldest daughter. "It is putting a monstrous bore upon me, if I am to do battle with all your windmills. You really should not have brought us abroad at all, ma'am, if you were conscious of not having strength of mind sufficient to overcome the ridiculous prejudices to which you have been accustomed at home. I confess, indeed, that I am a good deal disappointed at hearing you speak in this manner; for though, of course, we all know that your education, like that of every other woman brought up in England, must have placed you a thousand leagues behind those who have

had the advantage of visiting the Continent in youth, yet still I flattered myself that you had sufficient quickness of observation to enable you to get rid of all such nonsense."

"And so I have, Agatha," said Mrs. Roberts, bridling with conscious ability, "and you would soon perceive that you were perfectly right in thinking so, if you would but have a little patience. But it is not fair, my dear, to expect that everybody should be as quick as yourself. But let us talk a little soberly and reasonably about all this. You hurry on so, that I declare I hardly know what it is you do want. Do you mean, both of you, that you think we ought to give up this expensive house that we stand engaged to pay for during the whole of the summer—do you really mean that we ought to give this up directly, and set off to Rome after Lord Lynberry?"

"I don't know what you mean, ma'am, by going *after* Lord Lynberry. As he is gone already, we *must* go after him, if we ever intend to go to Rome at all. But not to quarrel with phrases," pursued Agatha, assuming great dignity of manner, "not to quarrel with phrases, but to come with equal courage and sincerity to the real question at once, I do think that if Maria feels persuaded that Lord Lynberry has left Baden-Baden by the desire of his father, and that, notwithstanding his doing so, he is still attached to her, in that case I certainly do think that it is your duty, ma'am, to bring them together again, and that with as little delay as possible."

"Well, Agatha," replied her mother, "I suppose you are right, for certainly, according to the old system of things, it *was* hardly reasonable to suppose that Lord Southtown would approve of the match just at first. But then, my dear girls, I must say that I think the question of our going or not going ought to depend very much upon what has passed between Maria and Lord Lynberry. Nobody can know this, you know, but her own dear self; and though I am sure I would be the last person in the world to insist upon a poor dear blushing girl telling everything that had passed between herself and her lover, yet I do think that, under the circumstances, Maria ought to be a little open with us. Don't you think so, Agatha?"

"Why yes, ma'am, I confess I think there is a good deal of reason in what you say," replied Agatha. "The giving up the house, Maria, certainly ought not to be done without some good reason for it. You need not tell everything, dear; but if he either said or did anything which proved that he left you with the sentiments and emotions of a lover, I really think that you ought to confess it to mamma; and if you do not, she must certainly be held excusable if she refuses to set off for Rome."

"Well, then, ma'am," replied Maria, with a good deal of indignation naturally arising from the force thus put upon her delicacy, "well, then, ma'am, he took me in his arms and kissed me! I don't know what more you would have!"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE reflective reader will not have found it difficult to forestall the result of the conversation between Mrs. Roberts and her daughters, which was detailed in the last chapter. The persuasive eloquence of Maria was certainly felt the more strongly, because Mrs. Roberts herself had become heartily sick of Baden-Baden ; and much as that fond parent admired the great mental powers of her eldest daughter, she might not have yielded so readily to her spirited reasoning on the subject of the house, had not one or two little circumstances led her very ardently to wish that the whole edifice, balcony and all, had been sunk in the Red Sea before the moment at which she entered it. It would be useless to follow the progress of her tacit reasonings, up to the moment that her bold final resolution was taken ; it is enough to say that Mr. Roberts was made to understand that there was no use in saying anything more upon the subject, for that good sense and proper feeling imperiously demanded their immediate departure. Mrs. Roberts, doubtless from an impulse of female delicacy, did not deem it necessary to state the conclusive anecdote of the kiss to her husband ; but, by thus resting her argument upon the general ground of good sense and proper feeling, left him no excuse whatever for making himself troublesome by useless opposition. And so Mr. Roberts desired that she would please to do whatever she thought best. It was therefore within a very short time indeed after the departure of Lord Lynberry and his companions from Baden-Baden, that Mrs. Roberts and the three young ladies might once again have been seen, hanging each over a travelling trunk, laboriously employed in depositing within it rather more than it could conveniently contain. Edward considered himself as one of the most accomplished packers in Europe, and never suffered any one to touch his portmanteau but himself ; and poor Mr. Roberts, too, upon all former occasions had rather ostentatiously displayed his power of being useful ; but now all packing energy seemed dead within him. In truth, a very important moral revolution was very rapidly taking place in Mr. Roberts. When he first listened to his wife's arguments respecting the great advantages to be obtained by exchanging his sober home in England—for he knew not very well what, upon the continent—he most sincerely believed her to be one of the very cleverest women and very best managers that ever were born ; but, as it turned out, poor man ! he was, as the reader must be by this time aware, anything but “blest in so believing.” Nevertheless it was long, surprisingly long, before he began even to guess that it was possible he might have been mistaken. Nay, even when a vague doubt timidly occurred to him, suggested by meditating on the very puzzling novelties of all kinds upon which they were thrown, it led

him no further towards doubting his wife's great financial capacity, than just thinking that she did not seem to be quite so clear in her accounts in Paris as in London. But then came the great master-stroke of obtaining Miss Harrington as an inmate, and this for a long time sufficed to set everything like pecuniary alarm at defiance; nor did even the splendour of the Balcony House, or the startling innovation of a carriage for the whole summer, occasion him any lasting alarm; but when he heard the admired wife of his bosom lay it down as law, as peremptory as it was new, that upon every occasion where money was greatly wanted, the capital of his little fortune was to be drawn upon to supply the want, he really felt as if the solid earth was in the act of melting away from under his feet.

But if the long confirmed habit of implicit trust was shaken by this, that of conjugal obedience was not; and the terrified but compliant gentleman yielded to the demand made for his signature, in the manner that has been related; yet there was no habit strong enough to keep him from feeling a very new and very disagreeable sensation of doubt as to what was to happen next. Wonders had followed so quickly on each other, that all conjectures as to what was or what was not likely to occur to him and his race, were set completely at defiance; and the poor man felt as if he were rolling head over heels in an atmosphere of clouds, athwart which, indeed, occasionally shot beams of exceeding brightness; and coronets, and bleeding hearts, and parks, and palaces, and sons-in-law and a daughter-in-law, all became visible in succession; yet the rolling-over-and-over sensation which accompanied it all made him exceedingly uncomfortable, and, acting like a sort of mental sea-sickness, left him languidly and despondingly unable to help himself.

"What does make papa stand looking so like a fool?" said Agatha. "He seems to grow more stupid and helpless every day."

"My dear Agatha," replied her mother, suddenly pausing in the very act of locking her own particular trunk, "my dear Agatha, you know that my most anxious wish has always been to bring up my children in habits of respect to their father; and that way of speaking is not at all pretty, my dear. Your poor dear papa is *not* so young as he has been—I won't deny that, Agatha; but you and your brother and sister have a great deal to be thankful for, I promise you. It is not every man who, as he feels himself growing old, has the good sense to make up his mind to let his wife manage everything for him. Some old gentlemen are dreadfully obstinate, I can tell you, and most abominably troublesome, which is what we really have none of us a right to say of your poor dear father. So don't let me hear you speak in that sort of way again, my dear."

Miss Agatha turned on her heel, and screwed up one eye with a merry expression, which was perfectly intelligible to her sister, for

whose advantage the grimace was performed ; but Mrs. Roberts saw it not, and returned to the occupation she had suspended while uttering her pious lecture, with the noble self-approving satisfaction of a Roman pattern matron, who knows that she has done her duty.

It was fortunate for Mrs. Roberts that she had so fully established her new system of drawing upon capital, before all her Baden-Baden bills came in upon her, or she might have been a little dismayed, and a good deal puzzled, as to the means of paying them.

"Mercy on me, mamma, have you got all those bills to pay before we start ?" exclaimed Agatha, upon entering the room, where the painstaking lady was laboriously engaged in endeavouring to ascertain the sum total. "Why, what on earth will you do for money ?"

"I never saw such a place as this in the whole course of my life !" replied her mother. "The people must be the very greatest cheats upon earth. I give you my word of honour, Agatha, that there is not a single bill here that I can be said to have forgotten. I have always taken the greatest care to keep in my head a general idea of everything that was owing ; but who in the world can undertake to say that these abominable tradespeople have not put down lots and lots of things that we have never had ? and then they write and spell in such a way ! I am sure I can't read one quarter of the words in any bill here. All I know is, that from first to last, I have managed everything with the very greatest economy ; but certainly these bills will make a dreadful hole in the sum I have made your father draw for."

"I should think so, ma'am," returned Agatha, raising her eyebrows, and opening her handsome eyes rather more widely than usual.

"I tell you what, Agatha, I want you to talk a little common sense to Edward for me ; he will be more likely to listen to you than to me. He is one of the finest creatures, I know, that ever lived, and I am as proud of him as I ought to be. Nothing can be more manly and spirited than all his notions about Bertha, and I have no doubt in the world that he will manage matters in that quarter perfectly well at last ; but the fact is, Agatha, that he is wasting time. When one sees such a sight as this," she continued, pointing to the sinister and threatening-looking folios which covered the table, "when one sees such a sight as this, Agatha, it is impossible to help feeling that the sooner Miss Bertha Harrington is turned into Mrs. Edward Roberts the better."

"Edward is a good, clever fellow, I know that quite as well as you do, ma'am ; but, in the first place, I suspect that he is just at present at the feet of another woman ; and in the next, I greatly doubt if Miss Bertha has the least inclination to see him at hers."

Mrs. Roberts looked up into the face of her daughter with a rather mysterious sort of smile.

"You have never had any confidential conversation with your brother, have you, my dear, upon the subject of Bertha Harrington?"

"Confidential, ma'am? I don't exactly know what you mean by confidential—he never talks very much about her in any way," replied Agatha; "but he has certainly confessed to me that he dislikes her more than any girl he ever saw in his life."

Mrs. Roberts again smiled mysteriously.

"All that, you know, and Edward knows too, as well as we do, Agatha, has nothing to do with his object in selecting her for his wife," replied Mrs. Roberts, very much with the same accent and manner that a queen-mother might have employed when speaking diplomatically of the espousals of her royal son. "I have taken no notice whatever," she resumed, "of his little flirtation with that pretty-looking Madame de Marquemont. I know that it never answers to plague men about those sort of things. When he is married I dare say he will be quite as steady as other men of fashion, and I really don't see that one has any right to ask more. Young men will be young men, that's the fact, and not all the mothers in the world can prevent it."

"You are quite right there, ma'am," replied her daughter, "but still, under all the circumstances, I should be better pleased if I thought Edward was rather more certain of getting Bertha Harrington. Her fortune, and the connexion too, would unquestionably be very advantageous."

"He is quite aware of it, my dear," returned her mother, with another smile; "but I have promised to keep his secret. If you really feel uneasy about it, Agatha, you had better manage to get a little private and quite unreserved conversation with him; he would soon set your heart at rest, I'll answer for it. And if you do set him talking on the subject, my dear girl, urge him not to lose time. Look there," she added, pointing to the bills, "and that will inspire you with eloquence on the subject."

Agatha was too busy at that moment to seek the *tête-à-tête* her mother recommended, but her curiosity was awakened, and she determined to find an early opportunity for gratifying it.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

MEANTIME, Mr. Edward Roberts himself was not altogether without what the immortal Major Sturgeon was wont to call his "little fracasces." His tender friendship for Madame de Marquemont had reached its climax. And we all know that everything which grows, even an oak-tree, having once attained its highest point of strength and perfection, begins to decline. This process is in oak-trees a very slow one, slower a good deal than that by which the soft passion of love evaporates after it has once begun to fall away. Unfortunately, however, the fascinating countess had

become fonder of him than ever ; she confessed that she never was happy without him ; and as to enduring the dreadful bore of shopping without having his delightful chit-chat to amuse her the while, it was quite out of the question ! But though fully conscious of this flattering excess of partiality on her part, the young man, in all the thoughtless wantonness of youth, had, with little or no preparation, disclosed to her the heart-rending fact of his almost immediate departure.

"Am I then to see you no more, Edward ?" she exclaimed with tender earnestness.

"Oh dear, yes," he replied, "very often, I hope. To-morrow I am going to dine with some men at 'La Favorite ;' but you may depend upon my calling on you, my sweet friend, the morning after, and then, dear Arabella, we must consult about future meetings."

"The day after to-morrow," she repeated ; "oh, that is very long ! But you will not fail me then, dear Edward ? You will be sure to come ?"

Whereupon he reassured her gentle heart by an oath—kissed her hand—and departed, whistling "Rory O'More."

The young gentleman kept his oath. On the day after the morrow he came again, but instead of being welcomed by the charming countess in person, he received the following note, put into his hand by the maid of the lodging-house, with something very like a broad grin :—

"My husband, my tyrant husband, is about to drag me from Baden and from you ! Imagine my despair, and pity it ! Gracious Heaven ! is it possible ? Is that hateful rumbling the sound of the diligence, into which within five minutes I must throw myself, in order to be dragged away from the only man who ever possessed my heart ? He comes—he comes ! Farewell, Edward ! Oh, a long farewell ! But, perhaps, not for ever !

"ARABELLA."

"How very lucky !" exclaimed the unfeeling young man. "I was desperately afraid that I should hear she was going to follow me."

Before the day was half over, however, he discovered that not only a multitude of pretty things, the purchase of which he had certainly sanctioned during the first affectionate weeks of their intimacy, but a very alarming amount of other articles, had, as it now appeared, been set down at more than one shop to his account ; which, added to the croupier's claims against him, formed a sum total that disagreeably startled him. There was little use, however, in reading and re-reading the items, or in swearing either at the pretty articles themselves, or at their pretty wearer ; something more business-like must be done, and the best thing he could

think of was to go to the shops with the bills in his hand, and demand, with a good deal of vehement indignation, how the devil they dared to send in bills to him with which he had nothing to do ; concluding his spirited remonstrance by saying, "Do you take me for the countess's husband, you *scélérat* ?"

"Assurément, non, monsieur," replied the master of the shop, with an obsequious smile.

"Then carry your bills to the person who is," returned Edward, in a blustering tone. "I should like to know what sort of law in must be that could make me pay the bills of another man's wife."

"Come here, Arnold," said the master of the shop to a young man who was standing at the opposite counter, "and you too, Ernest," he added, addressing another, who was lounging at the door. "Have you not, both of you, served this gentleman at different times with various articles ordered by him for use of Madame de Marquemont ?"

"Yes," and "yes," replied stoutly and positively each of the persons applied to.

Edward knit his brows, stamped with his foot, nay, even clenched his fist, as he began a bullying reply ; but the gentle, peaceful smile, with which the travelling Parisian mercer regarded him, stopped him short, and he concluded his remonstrance by muttering, "The word of your *garçons de boutique* will not be taken against mine."

"We shall be three to one, sir," replied the mercer, with another of his civil smiles ; "besides, to be perfectly frank, monsieur, I have other evidence as to the nature of the transaction. I am perfectly prepared to prove before the tribunaux that I was not in the habit of trusting Madame de Marquemont—nay, that I had positively refused to trust her three days only before the date of the first entry in this bill. It was you, sir, whom I trusted," he continued, with a bow of profound respect. "If you remember, sir, the lady said, 'Do give your name, dear friend—the people don't know me.'"

Edward bit his lips. There was so much of able mimicry in the man's tone and manner, that the unlucky young Englishman, even if he had previously forgotten the fact, could not fail to have remembered the words when so repeated. "D'ailleurs, monsieur," resumed the courteous mercer, "your address, as well as your distinguished name and appearance, was quite a sufficient guarantee. We all know that none but the most illustrious families ever take the Balcony House—and everything, you must be aware, monsieur, is immediately known in a little place like this—so different from Paris ! There was not a tradesman in the town who did not immediately know that the Balcony family had hired a carriage for the summer, and were on terms of the most intimate friendship with Milor Lynberry and Milor Montgomery. Ah ! monsieur, who would

have a scruple of accepting your name as a guarantee ! No one, *assurément* !—and accordingly, monsieur, it has been accepted by myself, as well as by all the other most fashionable *marchands* at the Baths. Nor have we, any of us, the slightest fear that we shall find cause to regret our noble confidence !”

Mr. Edward Roberts had not a word more to say against a claim so every way well established. However, for consistency's sake, he again knit his brows, and then said, “At any rate, you must wait a few days for it.”

The mercer again bowed low.

“Whenever it suited the convenience of monsieur,” he said. “Any time within the next week would be perfectly satisfactory to him. A family of such distinction as that of monsieur could not leave Baden in the style that had suited Madame de Marquemont, who, *cependant, était, il faut l'avouer, une femme charmante.*”

With such satisfaction as could be derived from this opinion, the unfortunate Edward quitted the shop ; but found more solid consolation in the conviction that his father and mother would not leave him behind in a gaol, than even in the sympathetic admiration of the shopkeeper for Madame de Marquemont.

It was to his mother, therefore, that this pretty specimen of the English nation betook himself, in order to find the means of confirming the French shop-keeper's favourable opinion of himself and his *distinguished* family ; and he certainly found, notwithstanding the astounding demand for fresh supplies that he brought upon her, that he was right in conjecturing that he should not be left behind in a gaol. Mrs. Roberts, however, did begin to feel that a few more months passed like the three last would bring her pecuniary affairs into rather a desperate condition ; and therefore, having distinctly answered Edward's distinct question of “Do you intend, ma'am, to leave me here to rot in a gaol ?” in the negative—which answer, by the way, she gave as promptly as distinctly, for her son looked at her as she asked the question with such wide-open round eyes, that she was quite frightened—she ventured to hint that the sooner he put himself in possession of Miss Harrington's fortune the better it would certainly be for himself and his family, as he must by this time be aware.

“And the thing shall be done, ma'am,” he replied, “as soon after we leave this cursed place as you shall be pleased to put the needful quantity of tin into my hands. An old woman—I beg your pardon, ma'am—may not be quite as much up to all the turnings and twistings of such a job as a young man—'twould not be quite fair to expect it ; but yet, mother, I won't believe that you are such a fool as not to know that a man cannot get through it without a good fist-full of ready money. As soon as you can manage to scratch together a hundred pounds for me, after these d—d debts are paid, I will turn your hateful Miss Bertha into Mrs. Edward Roberts in no time.”

Although these conditions were by no means unreasonable, they were by no means easy—and Mrs. Roberts fairly groaned.

“Oh! very well, ma’am,” resumed the young gentleman. “I am by no means in a hurry about it, I assure you. I will not deny that, as things seem to be going, the scheme, which, as I shall manage it, cannot fail, may be convenient; but nevertheless, it is too disagreeable for me to be at all in a hurry about it. It is *you* who are to look out about it, remember, and not I. All I can say is, if you will furnish the money, I will marry the girl. And if that does not content you, I can’t help it.”

“It does, it does content me,” replied his mother, eagerly, “and the money *shall* be forthcoming, if I guide your father’s hand to make him draw for it.”

“And when am I to have the cash that is to free me from the gripe of all the rascals here?” demanded the young gentleman.

“Nay, it must be done at once, Edward,” replied his mother. “Your father has got into a queer sort of care-for-nothing way lately, which will make getting another draught easy enough. Though it is not very pleasant either to see him do what one asks, just as if he was asleep.”

“Dear me, ma’am,” returned her lively son. “I should have thought that must be the pleasantest possible state in which to find him, when he was required to transact business—unless, indeed, he could be brought to such a desirable state of lucidity as to give his signature when he was asleep outright.”

“For shame, Edward! How can you talk so!” replied the conscientious mother. “You know, my dear, I have always made it a most particular point with you and your sisters, that you should always treat your father with the greatest respect. He is a very good man, Edward, though perhaps he may not be quite as bright as his children. But it is not his fault, remember, if he had not quite such a mother as you have had.”

The sneer with which this well-brought-up youth turned on his heel, and concluded the interview, was an offering from his heart to both his parents, and might, without falsifying his feelings, have been divided very equally between them.

All that now remained to be done before again packing themselves into the identical vetturino equipage which had conveyed them to Baden, was to take a proper leave of Agatha’s illustrious friend the Princess Fuskymuskoff. They parted fondly, and with mutual regret: the princess was in every respect exactly such a friend as suited Miss Agatha; and Miss Agatha was in every respect exactly such a friend as suited the princess. So they mutually promised a punctual correspondence by letter; and the princess very positively declared, that if she were fortunate enough to obtain a prolonged leave of absence from the Emperor of Russia and the prince her husband, she should certainly pass the next

winter in the same capital as her friend. She then put a little diamond ring upon the finger of the enchanted Agatha, kissed her on both cheeks, and dismissed her. And so ended the campaign of the Robertses at Baden-Baden.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE sort of journey, as to enjoyment, which was now begun, continued and ended, *à la vetturino*, by our travellers, may very easily be imagined, and for this reason it shall not be described. The great object that the master spirits of the expedition had before them was the reaching the *imperial city* as speedily as possible. It is vastly probable that they were not the first travellers to whose imaginations this same object acted as a magnet, drawing their bodies after it by a prodigiously powerful attraction; but it may be doubted if the space between the Duchy of Baden and the city of the Cæsars was ever before passed over with such utter indifference to everything that lay between, as on the present occasion. As to Bertha, it was a feeling stronger than indifference which caused her to submit not only without a murmur, but with positive satisfaction, to this cat-in-a-basket sort of mode of being conveyed over some of the most beautiful and most interesting country in the world. She knew what it was to *look* in the society of the things we call Roberts, and now she knew also what it was to enjoy the happiness, the intense happiness, which "bountiful sweet Heaven" can pour into our hearts, through our eyes, when the spirit is roused up and awakened by the companionship of a friend—a friend like Vincent. So that Bertha, like the rest of the party, very greatly preferred getting on as fast as possible to any lingering on the road.

"Good gracious! how lucky Bertha is!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts. "How she does sleep, to be sure!" And no wonder she thought her young companion's power of reposing during the fatigue of this long, tedious journey, both enviable and extraordinary, for never did chance bring to the ear of Bertha the well-known name of some spot, consecrated by history, poetry, or art, without her closing her eyes with resolute firmness, and mentally exclaiming, "Oh! a thousand times rather would I never see it at all than see it with them!"

In this manner they crawled onwards towards Rome, and when at length they passed through the Porta del Popolo, they had at least one feeling that was common to them all, which, though it had but little of classic enthusiasm in it, was at least perfectly unaffected and sincere. It would be difficult to say which of the six persons who occupied the carriage within and without was the most delighted at feeling that they were about to quit it. This feeling of enjoyment would doubtless have been less unmixed in the fair bosoms of the two Miss Robertses had they known that

almost at the very moment when they were congratulating themselves upon being in Rome, the Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery were in the act of settling themselves very comfortably in private lodgings in Florence. The phrase used by Lord Lynberry respecting the necessity of their "getting on to Rome," had left no doubt on the minds of the Robertses that they were immediately going to honour that favoured city with their presence; and as they knew no more than the man in the moon where to apply in order to ascertain whether they had arrived there or not, they went on hoping and expecting to meet them somehow or somewhere for many and many a tedious day after their arrival. Bertha, indeed, knew where they were as well as they did themselves, having ascertained the way from the hotel to the post-office within a few hours after her arrival, which enabled her, by profiting by her established licence of exit and entrance, to obtain a long letter from her cousin William, informing her of their intention of passing a month or six weeks at Florence. But all and every of the Roberts family would have been as likely to consult an umbrella or walking-stick upon any point on which they wished for information as Bertha Harrington; and as she was as little likely to volunteer intelligence as they were to ask for it, they profited not much by Mr. Vincent's accurate details respecting the future movements of his party.

For above a week Mrs. Roberts and her two daughters did nothing (after getting into private lodgings), nay, they attempted to do nothing save walking about the streets in the hope of meeting their lost friends. But as this did not answer, Agatha, with her usual acuteness of intelligence, suggested the necessity of taking more decisive measures for obtaining the intelligence so important to them.

"Necessary!—to be sure it is necessary," said her mother, in reply to this very sensible observation; "but you must please to find out, Miss Agatha, the way to set about it."

"True, ma'am—quite true. We have been to blame in remaining thus long without taking more effectual measures. I mean to make either my father or Edward go round with me to all the principal hotels. It is a great inconvenience the not being able to speak Italian. But I must make French do. I can bear this suspense no longer. We are wasting our time most deplorably!"

The energetic efforts of Agatha were successful. The civility of a waiter at the second hotel they entered, for the purpose of making inquiries, set them in the right way of obtaining the information for which they long wished, and before night they had ascertained, beyond the hope of mistake, that no such persons as Lord Lynberry and Mr. Montgomery were in Rome. It was a dreadful blow, but it stunned them only for a few minutes. They happily remembered that the assertion respecting their intention

of coming to the imperial city had been positive, but no one recollected having heard them say how long they intended to be *en route*, or what places they intended to visit by the way. They reproached themselves severely for having omitted to ask these interesting particulars while it was yet time, but drew consolation from the obvious fact that nothing could be more natural than that they should wish to see all that was to be seen.

"In short," said Agatha, "it is idle folly for us to spend our hours in fretting over what is past. Let us all remember to be more careful for the future. People who wish to pass successfully through life, must never leave themselves ignorant of the movements of friends who are important to them. But though it is well to impress this upon our minds for the future, it is useless to dwell upon it any more now. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the best manner of employing the interval which may still elapse before we can renew the pleasant *coterie* of Baden-Baden. Perhaps you have forgotten, ma'am, that we have letters of introduction to a Polish lady! She is a relative, I believe, or at any rate an intimate friend, of the Princess Fuskymuskoff; and if she should turn out to be at all the same kind of superior person, and likewise disposed to be civil to us, the having a little leisure to cultivate her acquaintance before the arrival of the friends who will be sure to absorb us, as heretofore, may be, after all our regrets, rather advantageous than otherwise."

"It is very natural that *you* should think so, Agatha. But very unnatural that *I* should," said Maria. "However, of course I don't mean to object to any effort that may lead to our being restored to the society of our fellow-creatures. The life we have led since we came to this shocking dull place is quite too horrid, and

really do think that people less high-principled and religious than we are would be found hanging to their bed-posts after such a week as we have endured. The very fact that we have neither of us unpacked a single smart thing since we arrived speaks plainly enough the sort of condition we have been in."

"It does indeed, my dear!" said her mother. "It does indeed speak volumes! You are always the one to give us a helping hand, Agatha, in all difficulties. What is it you propose to do, my dear, respecting this Polish lady! I forget her name. What *is* her name, my dear Agatha?"

"Her name, ma'am, is of little consequence," replied Miss Roberts, with a slight sneer, "for you will never be able to pronounce it. She is called Yabiolporakiosky—the Princess Yabiolporakiosky. Her husband is banished to Siberia, and my dear Siandrina told me she was one of the most charming women in the world."

"Poor dear lady! I dare say if she is so very amiable as the other princess says, we may all of us grow very fond of her, and the more so, of course, because of her high station, and her being

so much to be pitied, which always does touch one's heart, coming together; but yet, Agatha, I can't but say that just at present it would have been better for us if she had not been in such a very melancholy condition; for Heaven knows, we want something to cheer us just now. However, her being a princess must be advantageous. What do you mean to do about beginning the acquaintance, my dear?"

"You need not trouble yourself about that, ma'am. The man you have hired may be at my command, I suppose, for an hour or two?"

"Certainly, my dear. All day if you want him, except just at dinner time," replied her mother, with a deep sigh. "I confess I never did feel so dull and miserable in my life. Shall you write, or call, or what, my dear?"

"I wish you would not trouble yourself about it, ma'am," replied Agatha. "Depend upon it I will do what is proper, and will tell you the result as soon as I know it myself. Will you let me have a little money, ma'am, in case I should want a carriage? I have not a farthing."

"Upon my word, Agatha, I would rather a great deal that you should give me a good box on the ear than ask me for money. There seems to be some wicked charm at work against me about money—for the more I get from your father, and the more I try to save, the more distressed I grow. I really never did see anything like it!"

"Just as you please, ma'am," replied her daughter, pushing away from her the pen and ink with which she had been preparing to write. "Just as you please. I don't think the loss of this new acquaintance will be more felt by me than by the rest of you. I know that poor dear Edward expected a good deal from the introduction, and it certainly would be an advantage when our friends come, that they should see we had some decent acquaintance. However, I don't care a straw about it. Only I certainly shall not *walk* to make a call upon the princess."

"Good gracious, mamma, what can you be thinking about!" said Maria, in an accent that seemed to threaten a burst of tears. "Do you really intend, for the sake of saving a few pence, to prevent our making acquaintance with a princess?—and we, too, in such a condition as we are now! Upon my honour, ma'am, it seems as if you had been doing everything you could think of on purpose to break our hearts! First letting us make the most intimate friendships with the most enchanting set of people in the world, and then tying up your purse and saving sixpence, in order to make us sit still, twisting our thumbs, without the comfort of a single soul to speak to—and that, too, in the very dirtiest, dullest, old town in the world! Oh, dear! oh, dear! how I wish we were at Cheltenham or Brighton!"

"I am sure, Maria, I came to Rome wholly and solely to please

you," returned her mother. "You don't suppose that I care anything about the curiosities they talk of in this musty fusty old place, do you? And I do think it is too bad turning upon me with reproaches upon its dulness, when we might have lived and died without even being disgusted by the sight of its nasty, dirty, narrow streets if it had not been for you and your falling in love with Lord Lynberry."

"Don't you, Agatha," said Maria, turning towards her sister with a face glowing with indignation, "don't you think mamma is the only mother that ever lived who would speak of what has happened as my falling in love with Lord Lynberry, and not his falling in love with me?"

"Mamma is very queer sometimes, certainly; but it is no good wasting our time in talking about it. It is much more to the purpose for me to know at once whether she means for us to make the acquaintance of the Princess Yabiolporakiosky or not. Will you please, ma'am, to say what is to be done at once, without wasting any more time about it?"

"Done? Why you must go to her, Agatha," said the hard-pressed parent, unlocking the workbox in which was deposited all the ready money she had, and taking out a couple of dollars. "There is no help for it now, I see that; but if Maria does not marry Lynberry, and that pretty soon, I begin to suspect that we shall find coming abroad a bad joke."

CHAPTER XL.

THE conversation recorded in the last chapter took place immediately after the family breakfast; and before those who had been engaged in it met again at dinner, a great deal of important business had been transacted. No sooner did Agatha find herself in possession of the two dollars which had been so reluctantly bestowed upon her, and the time of the man-servant at her command, than she rushed into her bed-room, and without another moment's delay began to release the "smart things" whose imprisonment had been so pathetically deplored. Maria had followed her, looking the picture of sour woe and grumbling discontent; a condition which she herself described, when asked by her brother what was the matter with her, by saying that she was "only dreadfully out of spirits." But, to do her justice, her ill-humour was not of an obstinate character, for no sooner did the various treasures from the at-last opened travelling trunks greet her eyes, than her features relaxed, and in a very few moments she became as gay and as voluble as ever.

"We must make the best of it, Agatha," she said, seizing upon a favourite bonnet, and smiling a welcome to her recovered self in the looking-glass. "Fortunately, Lord Lynberry is not the only man in the world; and though, Heaven knows, I am attached to

him most passionately, there is no good in crying my eyes out because he has been longer coming from Baden to Rome than we have. On the contrary, I think that the best compliment I can pay him will be taking care to look as handsome as I possibly can when he arrives. And that's what I will do, you may depend upon it; and I advise you, Agatha, to act upon the same principle with Montgomery. They would think it no compliment, I'm sure, if we were to greet them with pale cheeks and heavy eyes."

"I thank you for your advice, Maria, though it is not exactly necessary on the present occasion. The man lives not for whose sake, when absent, my complexion could vary. And yet I can both see and appreciate superiority when I meet with it. These flowers don't look shabby, do they? This *tour de bonnet* is particularly becoming to me; and my first appearance at Rome, in my own character, shall be in my green silk, black lace mantle, and pink bonnet."

"You can't do better," replied Maria, cordially. "You look so like your own dear princess! That is so exactly the way she puts on her beautiful bonnets. And how I do envy you, Agatha, having to dress and make a visit. Would it be quite, quite impossible for me to go too?"

"Absolutely, Maria; so don't think of it. My dear Siandrina charged me to see her for the first time alone, and, in fact, gave me a very particular message for her that she did not choose to trust in a letter. So you perceive it is impossible."

"Yes, I suppose it is. But will you promise that if she gives parties you will get me asked? Think what it would be to stay at home in an evening with mamma and papa."

"Don't be afraid. You are very pretty, Maria, and I will take care she shall see you. If she gives parties she will be sure to ask you; and I dare say we shall get on very well if we can but screw out money enough for our dress. But I can't stay to talk about it now. I shall write a note to send up with my card; and while I get it ready, do go and tell Stefano to dress himself neatly to go out with me."

In half an hour afterwards Agatha was driving along the Corso, dressed with great care, and attracting many eyes by the fashionable-looking gaiety of her attire, and the newness as well as the beauty of her face.

As soon as she had left the house Maria sought relief from her own very oppressive company by going to her mother's room, where she found her engaged in unpacking a writing-desk, for the sake of examining the addresses of one or two letters of introduction which had been given her at Paris. "I know, Maria," she said, "that there are one or two for Italy, but I am afraid that there is not one for this nasty tiresome Rome."—"Oh! what a blessing it would be if there were!" replied Maria, eagerly.

"Open every cover, mamma. Don't overlook anything, for goodness' sake."—"You may look too, if you will, child. See, here is Milan one, Florence two, Naples one; but none for Rome. I suppose nobody ever does stay here; it certainly does seem to be the very dullest place in the world."—"What's that cover directed to you, mamma?" said Maria. "I suppose there must be something in it, or you would not have kept it."—"It is only an old letter, I believe from my good friend Mrs. Bretlow at Paris," replied her mother.—"Let us look at it, at any rate, mamma; that won't cost money, you know," returned Maria, "and it is just possible that we may find what may be useful. Drowning folks, you know, catch at straws; and considering that we have been a whole week in this dirty old place without having had a single soul to speak to, we may be said to be as badly off in point of society, you know, as drowning people in point of air."

Mrs. Roberts had persevered during the whole of this speech in taking out one by one every paper in her desk with her right hand, while she continued to hold Mrs. Bretlow's letter in her left; and having in this manner completed her unprofitable search, she at length graciously listened to the remonstrance of her daughter, and opened the envelope. "There!" cried Maria, triumphantly, as not only a note from Mrs. Bretlow, but another neatly folded and sealed, appeared within it, "there, ma'am! Rome! I was sure of it. I had quite a presentiment."—"Rome it is, sure enough," returned Mrs. Roberts. "Mrs. Horace Hopperton, Rome. Well, that is a bit of good luck, certainly. Let us see what Mrs. Bretlow says about her. I have had such a quantity of things to think of, that I had forgotten this letter altogether." Then turning to the epistle of her old acquaintance, she read, "I have enclosed you a letter to Mrs. Horace Hopperton. She has been living at Rome for several years, and, I am told, sees a great deal of company. She is a widow lady, with one son (unmarried), and both he and his mother are very rich. As she is exceedingly good-natured, and very fond of giving balls and having young people about her, I think the introduction may be useful."

"Was there ever such a piece of luck!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, raising her eyes to Heaven in thankfulness.

"Luck indeed! Now I don't care for anything, mamma," replied Maria. "We have had pretty good success both at Paris and Baden, and who knows what may happen to us here? But for pity's sake waste no time about it. I do think Agatha is very selfish, taking out the man for the whole day this way. If Stefano was at home, I don't see any reason why you and I should not dress too, and set out to make a visit to this Mrs. Horace Hopperton directly. I'm sure I'd give the world to get out."

"It would be capital fun, Maria, to be sure," replied her mother, "if you and I could steal a march upon her in this direc-

tion, while she is pushing herself forward all alone in another. Where is Edward?"

This question immediately suggested a whole train of hopeful possibilities, and, without waiting to reply to it, Maria rushed from the room and ran up a dark, narrow little staircase which led to that appropriated to her brother. To her extreme satisfaction she found him in it, busily occupied in parting his hair according to a new model which he had just been lucky enough to see in the Piazza de Spagna, where a very elegant-looking young man on horseback had taken off his hat to salute a lady who was stopping at the library in a coroneted carriage.

"Never mind me, Edward," said his sister, holding out to him Mrs. Bretlow's letter. "Just read that, will you?"—"The devil! Where did this come from?"—"From mamma's writing-desk. This may be worth something, Edward, mayn't it?"—"Worth? Why it may just turn Rome into Paris for us. What upon earth made the old lady keep it so close?"

"She forgot it; but don't scold about that now. Let us lose no more time about it if we can help it. You know Agatha's selfish, independent ways. She has made mamma give her two dollars for a carriage, and has taken Stefano with her that she may make her solitary visit in style to her intended Polish friend—the Princess Heaven knows what. She might so very well have taken either you or me with her! But mamma says, and she is quite right, that it would be capital good fun to steal a march upon her here; and we might do it as easily as possible, if you would help us."

"Help you? I'll help you fast enough," replied her brother. "It was a confounded shame for her to set off by herself, considering that we have not a single soul to speak to here. I'll help you, depend upon it. Where does this promising Mrs. Horace Hopperton live?"

"Ah! that's the worst of it—the only direction upon the letter is Rome."

"Never mind that—I know all about finding out people now—if you and the old lady will dress yourselves directly, I will run out and find where she lives, and bring back a carriage to take us. If my mother can shovel out two dollars for Agatha, she can do as much for us, with herself into the bargain, I suppose. Never mind about a footman—the people will never find out. Away with you, Maria—make yourself look as elegant as you possibly can—I shall do, shan't I?"

"Perfectly, Edward! your hair is divine. Off with you, and we will be ready for you in less than half an hour. Everything is unpacked now."

In a wonderfully short space of time after the discovery of the precious letter, Mrs. Roberts, with her son and younger daughter, had made their way to the drawing-room of Mrs. Horace Hopperton. The lady was fortunately not yet in it, and their cards

and introduction were sent to her. The examination of their documents, however, did not detain her long, for she made her appearance before her stranger guests had had half time enough to admire all the elegance of the apartment into which they had been shown. Nothing could be more courteous than her reception of them. She looked at the handsome faces of the brother and sister, and immediately decided that they would do very well in a waltz; and as Mrs. Roberts was very handsomely dressed, there seemed to be no impediment whatever to her producing them, by way of variety, at her weekly *soirée*, which was to take place on the morrow. Mrs. Roberts failed not to mention, incidentally, that besides a husband, who did not now go much into company, she had the happiness of possessing another daughter, and also that Miss Harrington, the daughter and heiress of Sir Christopher Harrington, was travelling with them. This information produced a general invitation for the whole party; and never did three visitors depart from a house better satisfied with their reception than did Mrs. Roberts and her son and daughter.

There was a fine triumphant glow on the cheek of Agatha when she met the family at the dinner-table on that eventful day, but there was something in the glances exchanged between Mrs. Roberts and her two younger children that was perhaps more triumphant still; but each party was coquetting with the curiosity of the other, and the soup was done with, and the *pièce de resistance* half carved, before either began to utter what they were bursting to say. At length Mrs. Roberts addressed her elder daughter in a gentle, humble sort of tone, saying, "Well, my dear, had you the good fortune to meet the princess at home?"—"Yes, ma'am, I had," replied Agatha. And there she stopped.—"Was she civil, my dear?" resumed Mrs. Roberts, meekly.

"Civil, ma'am?" echoed her daughter, in rather an indignant accent. "Civil!—what a phrase! The Princess Yabiolporakiosky, ma'am, was everything to me that I had a right to expect from the bosom friend of my dear Siandrina. She is an angel. But I am sorry to say that I fear she will be found extremely exclusive in her circle. I am not without fear that I shall have some difficulty in introducing you all—we are such an immense party! Perhaps I might manage as to Edward and Maria; but as to Miss Harrington, I am sorry to tell you, my dear," she added, bowing to Bertha across the table, "that I see no chance for you. And as to you, ma'am," turning to her mother, "we must see about it; we must have a little patience."—"Oh, certainly, my dear! I am quite aware of that. Does the princess receive, Agatha?"—"Yes, ma'am; a very brilliant assembly, I believe, once every month."—"ONCE every month!" repeated Mrs. Roberts, exchanging glances with Maria and Edward.—"Why, you don't suppose, ma'am, that a person so sought as I am quite sure the Princess Yabiolporakiosky is, could stay at home to receive every

night, do you?"—"No, Agatha, not every night; but many people of fashion, you know, receive every week; and that, if it is well done, helps the society of a place amazingly. The princess did not happen to invite you to come to her in a friendly way to-morrow evening, did she?"—"To-morrow evening? No, ma'am, she did not," replied Agatha, rather solemnly. "But I think it extremely likely she might have done so, had she not been engaged, as she told me, to a very splendid party; to which, dear creature! she said she would give the world to introduce me, were it possible to do so; but till I have been seen, she confesses, it would be more than she could venture. Mrs. Horace Hopperton, she told me, was the most exclusive person in Rome."—"Who, my dear?" said Mrs. Roberts, with increasing gentleness.—"Mrs. Horace Hopperton," repeated Agatha, haughtily; "but I really cannot conceive, ma'am, what interest you can feel in hearing me repeat her name."—"I beg your pardon for troubling you so, my dear," returned her mother; "but I thought I might have mistaken what you said. We are going—that is, your brother, and sister, and I—to Mrs. Horace Hopperton's to-morrow night."—"You, ma'am?" cried Agatha, becoming suddenly as red as an old-fashioned peony. "You? what do you mean, ma'am? What joke have you got now?"—"Joke, Agatha? What joke have you got, child? Do you suppose that because you stalk off with the footman in search of princesses the rest of the family are to sit still at home till you please to come back again? Is that your notion, Miss Roberts?"—"Oh, that's it, is it?" replied Agatha, curling her lip. "You intend to punish me for the sin of having a friend of my own, by trying to mystify me. I really should hardly have expected that Edward and Maria would have joined in such an abortive attempt."—"I don't know what you call an abortive attempt," returned Maria; "unless it was that mamma's attempt to get you invited with us might be said to be rather abortive, I don't think that you would easily find any adventure less so than our visit of this morning to Mrs. Horace Hopperton. If the greatest kindness and most cordial reception could justify one's calling a middle-aged lady an angel, I should be apt to declare that our new acquaintance was probably quite as angelic as yours."

Agatha stared at them all with astonishment and agitation. "Are you really in earnest?" said she, almost panting with emotion.—"Yes, to be sure we are," cried Edward, laughing. "One would think, to hear you, that we had never been invited to a party before. What is there so very extraordinary in it?"—"What is there extraordinary? How on earth have you managed to get an introduction and an invitation since I left you all languidly looking out of the window this morning," demanded Agatha. "And such an introduction, and such an invitation!" she added. "I don't, I won't, I can't believe it."—"Very well,"

said Edward, "we won't say any more about it now; when we come home to-morrow night we will bring you a description of the Princess Yab—you must let me call her Yab if she be ten times an angel, Agatha—for I shall never remember her infernal name. And so the Yab told you that she could not take you to Mrs. Horace Hopperton's, did she? Poor you! I am really very sorry for you, Agatha?"

"If you are in earnest, and if you all have contrived to get invited without me," returned Agatha, "you have used me shamefully, and you shall be punished for it, as sure as I am alive—that you shall, one and all of you, TRUST ME."—"Why, what a goose you are, Agatha!" cried her mother, with a timely laugh; "what a perfect gosling, not to understand a joke better than that!"—"What, it is all a joke then?" returned her daughter, with a look of very unequivocal scorn. "I certainly shall not retort your elegant compliment, ma'am, and call you a goose, but I must take leave to think that there was but little wit in your pleasantry."—"I don't think there was much, my dear," replied her mother, with exquisite sweetness of temper; "but who would have thought of your ever believing seriously for a single moment that I had really suffered you to be left out of the invitation? Did I ever do such a thing in my life, Agatha?"

"Was it only *that* part of it that was the joke?" cried Agatha. "Do you really mean that you have contrived to make the acquaintance of Mrs. Horace Hopperton, and that you have seen her?"

In reply to this question, Mrs. Roberts got up, and kissed the sublime forehead of her elder daughter with strong emotion. "Yes, my dear love!" she exclaimed; "yes, we do mean it; and is there any one for whose dear sake this little clever manœuvre on my part has given me more pleasure than for yours? But there shall be no reproaches, girls—no reproaches, Edward. We are all now going on so well, we are in such an excellent train for recovering all we have lost, that it would be worse than foolish, it would be positively sinful, to do anything but rejoice and push forward."—"Hurrah! mother!" exclaimed Edward, vehemently clapping his hands. "Upon my soul you are in your way the very best old woman in the world."—"Upon my word," said Maria, "I think so too."—"And I am sure I have no inclination to differ from you," rejoined Agatha, very graciously. "If mamma's joke produced too great an effect upon me, she must reproach her own good, clever acting for it. I certainly am very thankful," she added, "that we seem at last likely to get out of the slough of despond, into which we had suffered ourselves to plunge so desperately upon finding that our friends had not yet reached Rome. How differently everything appears now, doesn't it? I declare to you that at this moment, dearly as I value, and ever must value, the flattering attachment of Montgomery, I feel that I am capable of enjoying the

society of my fellow-creatures, provided they are of a proper class, as much as I ever did in my life."

"And I assure you, Agatha, I am not disposed to be behind-hand with you in good sense and proper feeling. Thank Heaven! I too have a heart capable of loving more than one of my fellow-creatures," replied her sister.

"That is all very well, my dears," said Mrs. Roberts, rather gravely. "I am very well pleased to see you looking like yourselves again. But you must not forget, if you please, that noblemen with twenty thousand a year don't grow on every hedge."

CHAPTER XLI.

THE anticipation of brilliant results from the introduction to Mrs. Horace Hopperton was fully and immediately verified, and once again the Robertses found themselves moving in the gayest circle that the place which for the time being they called their home afforded. It may truly be said of them, that on this and all similar occasions they very strictly obeyed the good-humoured maxim which bids us "look on everything on its best side." Had they done the reverse, they might have discovered, in the brilliant-looking throng which filled that lady's three saloons, several individuals whom they would have run out of the room to avoid in home-bred England; but they scorned to bestow their attentions while on their travels upon anything so contemptible as mere personal character, and devoting their observations entirely to the brighter side of the picture, they perceived, to their unspeakable delight, that they were again "*keeping company*" (to use their own phrase) with persons to whom their own station in society gave them no right to approach. This was enough; they scarcely asked of the gods to grant them any greater blessing, and might have said in the words of our Daere Petrarch,

Let but the cheat endure, I ask not aught beside.

Rome was by no means very full when the delighted Robertses were first installed among the *habitués* of Mrs. Horace Hopperton's splendid palazzo. November was not yet over, and many of those who proposed to make the eternal city their winter residence had not yet arrived, so that in truth they were quite a treasure to her. None but ladies who give a *soirée dansante* every week can be aware of the value of such an importation as the two pretty Miss Robertses and their well-dressed brother. Mrs. Horace Hopperton had been greatly pleased also by the bonnet and cloak of Mrs. Roberts at their first interview, nor was she at all insensible to the name of Sir Christopher Harrington, whose title, on referring to her baronetage, she found to be of a very respectably old creation; but when she saw the whole group in full ball costume she was perfectly enchanted. She civilly lamented the absence of Miss

Harrington, who had declined coming with them, but was too well satisfied with those who were present to think much of the absent; and before the evening was half over, it was evident that she meant to be on terms of very affectionate intimacy with the mother and daughters, and of pleasant playful familiarity with the son. The impression of that mother's admirable conduct in having got them all admitted to this enchanting new acquaintance was too fresh in the memory of Agatha to permit of her adhering to the exclusive system she had begun respecting the Princess Yabiolporakiosky. She presented mother, sister, and brother to her admired new friend, and had the pleasure of perceiving that, though they were not received with the same full-fledged affection as herself (which of course she did not wish they should be), yet that they were considered worthy of a very bewitching smile apiece. And, in truth, to people who valued either princessly smiles or beautiful smiles, those of the Princess Yabiolporakiosky were worth having, for the name and rank of her husband were of high nobility, though the autocrat of all the Russias had thought it best, in consequence of a *bon-mot* which had been reported to him as having been uttered by the prince, to request him to take up his abode for a few years in Siberia; and as to the *beauty* of her smiles, it would have been difficult to find any more universally or more deservedly popular. The Princess Yabiolporakiosky was, in truth, a *very* beautiful woman. The accident which had befallen her husband in the manner above related had induced her to ask the emperor's permission to travel, which had been graciously granted, and this was the fair creature's second winter in Italy. That her *salon* was one of the most distinguished in Rome, is quite certain; but to persons unacquainted with the mysterious anomalies of continental society, a detailed description of the elements of which it was composed would appear much too absurdly improbable to be credited, and therefore no such description shall be attempted. Let it suffice to say that English fathers and mothers, when they decide upon finishing the education of their daughters by a continental tour, should not invariably receive the words *DISTINGUISHED SALON* as a certificate of the respectability of the assemblies to which it is applied.

No previous success of the Roberts family had produced sensations of more unmixed delight among them than did the manner in which they were received by all to whom they were presented on this eventful evening. The Roman winter was, as we have said, only just beginning, and a group of young faces, even if less handsome than those of the Robertses, would have been well received by those who were self-elected as ball-givers for the ensuing season; and when, in addition to their good looks and becoming dresses, it was discovered that they all waltzed well, it seemed to be at once decided that they were to be taken into general favour, and made *the fashion*.

In short, the evening's amusement was perfect in every feature ; and when, as they drove home, Maria said, addressing her companions *en masse*, "Did you ever spend a more agreeable evening in your life?" the word "*never*" was most cordially uttered in reply by them all.

That night Mrs. Roberts and her three children went to bed in a state of perfect contentment. The past, and all its difficulties, its fears, and its regrets, vanished from the memories of all ; their dropping to sleep was delicious, and their dreams ecstatic. But at an early hour on the following morning Mrs. Roberts contrived to get her three children round her ; and though still looking, on the whole, vastly more light-hearted than she had done since the Lynberry and the Montgomery had left Baden, she said to them in an accent in which considerable anxiety might be detected,—

"And now, dears, what do you think we must do about a carriage? I had certainly completely made up my mind that for this winter we must content ourselves with hiring one, when we absolutely could not do without it ; but now, your poor father is positively killing himself with anxiety about the money ; and yet, it really is very difficult to decide—everything seems to open before us so brilliantly, doesn't it ? Do tell me, dears, what you think I ought to do?"

Maria looked at her elder sister, and so did Edward too, but as he did so he shrugged his shoulders, and said, "The question in my opinion lies in a nutshell—I should not suppose there could be two opinions on the subject."

"Nor I either, I confess," said Agatha. "As to my father's nervous vagaries, ma'am, he has been subject to them as long as I can remember anything. Don't you recollect the way he put himself into, the year before last, when you proposed my having riding lessons ? I had the lessons though, a dozen of them, and he was never a bit the worse for it. And to tell you the truth, ma'am, my own opinion decidedly is, that if your plans and views respecting us are to be dependent on my father's whims, you have done very, *very* wrong to bring us abroad. The doing so was decidedly a great effort, a very great effort—it showed great courage and decision of character on your part, for of course we all know that you were the author of the scheme ; and I cannot but think that if you will recall to mind the sort of society to which we were accustomed in London, and then contrast it with that in which we were so flatteringly received last night, you will be ready to allow that, so far, all your hopes have been realized."

"They have indeed, Agatha, and more—oh ! a thousand times more than realized ! Nevertheless, I won't deny that in a pecuniary point of view the coming abroad has *not* answered so well as I was led to expect it would do. But on this point I have surely no reason to blame myself. I suspect that the people from whom I got my information did not get into the sort of society that we

have done, and this of course is quite sufficient to account for the difference."

"Most certainly it is, ma'am," replied Agatha, with a little laugh that seemed to throw ridicule upon the idea that there could be any doubt about it; "and though I never, as I am sure you will allow, make you fine speeches, but, on the contrary, speak my real opinion on all subjects with the most perfect sincerity, I must say that I think the manner in which you have managed to bring us forward, and place us, as you have done, in the very first class of European society, does you infinite honour. And I certainly shall be very sorry, not only for our sakes, but for yours, if you suffer your plans and manner of going on to be paralyzed by the weakness of my father's character—who is evidently, poor man! very fast declining into old age and imbecility."

"Yes, poor dear man! he certainly is growing old apace; I see it as plainly as you do, Agatha," replied Mrs. Roberts, pitifully shaking her false curls; "but still, you know, it is *his* signature, and not *mine*, that must bring us the supplies; and as he never ceased all the time we were at Baden to make a fuss about our constantly having a carriage, I am afraid I shall find it very hard work to make him consent to it here. And yet I confess I do not see how it is possible for us to get on without it."

"Out of the question, ma'am, utterly out of the question," returned Agatha. "It would be infinitely better at once to make up our minds to refuse all invitations, and to pass the rest of our winter at Rome exactly in the manner in which we passed the first week, than to beguile ourselves with the belief that we can associate with such people as we were introduced to last night, without having a carriage."

"Good gracious, Agatha! don't say that!" exclaimed Maria, with a look and voice of the deepest melancholy. "I do think it would be quite too hard upon me, after I have exerted myself as I have done, and roused all my proper pride to bear the disappointment of not finding Lynberry here with proper spirit—I do think it will be too hard upon me, Agatha, if you try to persuade mamma that it will be best for us to give up going out! I am sure that, as far as I am concerned, I would a thousand times rather *walk* to the parties than not go to them at all."

"Well, my dears, if you would all of you make up your dear minds together, to try such a scheme, I won't throw any difficulties in the way of it. I dare say I could have a stout pair of clogs made that would keep my feet dry, and with good cloaks and umbrellas one may do a great deal. And I own I quite agree with Maria in thinking that it *would* be much better to walk to the parties than not to go at all, and pass our time in the horrid dismal way we did last week," said Mrs. Roberts.

Had not the indignation of Agatha at this proposal been really too great to leave her the power of speaking, her mother would

not have reached the conclusion of her last speech without interruption ; but having at length found breath, she said, with flashing eyes and energetic accent, " I must beg that I may not be forced to listen to such absurdities, ma'am, as you and Maria have just thought fit to utter. I am in earnest ; and if you are in jest, as you were yesterday, I request that you would be pleased to tell me so. I can employ my time better than in listening to such very absurd *plaisanteries*."

" Upon my word, Agatha, I was not in joke," replied Maria, with more courage than her mother at that moment ventured to display. " I assure you, Agatha, I mean exactly what I say. I *would* rather, a GREAT, GREAT deal rather, walk in mud-boots to such a party as we were at last night, and deliberately sit down in the ante-room, and take them off before the eyes of all the servants, than not go at all. But I don't tell you, Agatha, that I think it would be wise in mamma to make us do it. Nor do I in my heart believe it absolutely necessary."

" Necessary ! " repeated the indignant Agatha, still pale with anger, " necessary ? And pray, if that be necessary, why is it not equally so that we should lodge ourselves with the vetturino drivers, and other refuse of the people ? What is the difference, I should like to know, between the one degradation and the other ? I see none."

" No difference, Agatha, between lodging with stable-boys and drivers, and the not having a carriage of our own ? " said Mrs. Roberts, reproachfully. " Oh ! Agatha ! "

" There is no difference, ma'am, in the principle—none whatever. In both cases we should be placed without the pale of good society. And *that*, THAT once submitted to, I should care not a straw, as far as I am concerned, for anything else that could happen to me."

" It is impossible not to admire your noble feelings, my dearest Agatha," returned her mother, touched to the very heart by such a display of high-minded superiority ; " and yet, my dear, if you will quietly think of it for a minute, you will see that it is not my admiring you ever so much that can raise the money for paying the carriage. Isn't that true, Agatha ? Now don't be unfair, my dear girl, but confess honestly at once that what I say is true."

" Indeed, ma'am, I shall confess no such thing," returned Agatha, " for I should falsify every feeling and every opinion if I did. My knowledge of human nature convinces me that when the will is firm, steadfast, and uncompromising, NOTHING can stand against it. I know not, my eyes never beheld, the man capable of making *me* change any opinion I had formed, or any resolution I had taken. And I leave you to guess, therefore, in what light I must view your doubts and fears respecting my father's liking or disliking that a carriage should be hired."

" Yes, yes, dear Agatha," replied her mother, " I quite understand that. But after all, my dear, it is not so much his likes or dislikes as the money. I do really believe that such a fine mind

and noble character as yours might be capable of almost everything in the world, except finding money where there is none. But even you, Agatha, must confess *that* to be impossible."

"Upon my word, ma'am, I must again repeat that I shall confess no such thing," returned her daughter. "I presume that when you use the word *money*, you do not literally mean the sovereigns and dollars that are tossed about for daily use? Of course you cannot be quite so childish as that. I really do not suspect you of it. You speak not of *coin*, but of means. The steadfastness of will, and the firmness of purpose to which I allude, will certainly not expend itself in seeking shillings and sixpences in odd corners where they are not to be found. Its sphere of action is somewhat higher than that, ma'am. I will not attempt at this moment to enter upon any general explanation of the various ways by which a powerful mind is able to control circumstances, but will only say, what in fact is all that is necessary at the present moment, that were I you, ma'am, I should instantly commission Edward to find his way to the first establishment for letting out carriages in Rome, to select two of the handsomest-looking and most commodious equipages he can find—one open for the mornings, the other close for the night work,—and to engage the use of them for three months certain, together with a good pair of horses and a respectable coachman. This is what *I* should do; and as to the payment for them, I should trust for finding wherewithal to the same energy of character which dictated the ordering it. Do this, ma'am, without wasting any superfluous anxiety upon the subsequent question of ways and means, and depend upon it everything will go on smoothly."

"Indeed, Agatha, I feel it would be folly not to lean for support upon such a character as yours. It would be ungrateful to Providence for having bestowed on me the blessing of such a daughter!"

And Mrs. Roberts was so much touched as she uttered these words, that she drew out her pocket-handkerchief and blew her nose.

"Go, then, my dear Edward," she resumed, "go, and do for us the good service that your dear sister has suggested; and you may order the carriage to come to the door this morning at two. She is an extraordinary creature, Edward, isn't she?" added the proud mother, slightly passing her pocket handkerchief across her eyes.—"Why, yes, ma'am; Agatha is up to a thing or two," replied the young man; "there is no denying that."

CHAPTER XLII.

It did not greatly signify, for if it did not come to pass one day, it certainly would another, but it so chanced that poor Mr. Roberts happened to be standing in the little balcony upon which the two windows of the drawing-room opened, when the carriage

thus obtained drove up to the door, with Edward lounging on the front seat of it.

"Dear me, what a gay carriage!" said he, stepping back into the room, and addressing his wife, who, unluckily for her, was busily engaged in putting together the component parts of her last new bonnet, which, for the convenience of packing, had been taken to pieces. "Whose smart carriage can this be, I wonder, and how has Edward contrived to get into it?"

Heartily did Mrs. Roberts wish that she had contented herself with the dim light of her bed-room, instead of venturing at such a moment into the general sitting apartment. But her employment had beguiled her into a complete forgetfulness of time, and it was, in fact, later by an hour than she supposed it to be. She now gathered up her work in haste, and was hurrying from the room, seemingly without having heard the half-exclamation, half-inquiry of her husband; but the worthy gentleman had not yet reached that state of morbid indifference to what was going on around him which is sometimes found by such active and excellent managers as Mrs. Roberts to be the most agreeable mood of mind that a husband can be brought into—this mood he had not yet fully reached, and gave proof of it by repeating with very troublesome pertinacity, "Whose smart carriage is that?"—nay, he even exerted himself sufficiently to lay a restraining hand upon the lock of the door, while he mildly but earnestly said, "Do tell me, Sarah, whose carriage that is?"

"Whose carriage? why, the livery-man's carriage, to be sure. What can his name signify? Don't hold the door in that way, sir, but open it, if you please, directly. I don't want to keep the girls waiting," said Mrs. Roberts, boldly.

"Stay long enough, wife, to answer me one question," returned her husband, still resolutely keeping his hand on the lock of the door; "tell me if that carriage is hired for you? That is to say, Sarah, have we got to pay for it?"

"Pay for it!" cried Mrs. Roberts, in an accent of profound contempt, "what a perfect curmudgeon you do grow, Roberts! I wonder you don't ask who is to pay for every morsel of bread we eat. Once for all, sir, I wish you to understand that I will not be interfered with in my domestic arrangements. Nobody yet ever suspected me of not knowing how to manage a family. I have been married to you five-and-twenty years, sir, and you won't deny, I suppose, that I have been always looked up to by everybody as one of the very best of managers. I never asked any of my neighbours yet what I ought to get for my family and what I ought not, and I don't mean to begin now, I promise you."

"Then, Sarah, I am a ruined man!" exclaimed Mr. Roberts, in a voice that trembled from very genuine emotion. "That desperate manner of speaking shows it as clear as light. 'Tis all humbug, Sarah; all that you have been saying to me about our

affairs, for months past, is all humbug ! Where are the girls' lovers that you talked about ? Where is the chance of Edward's getting the rich young lady for a wife ? Doesn't she shut herself up from you all, as if on purpose to show that she won't have him ? It's all humbug, Mrs. Roberts, all humbug, and I am a ruined man !"

"If you are ruined it will be your own fault, and nobody else's," returned his wife, with vehement indignation, arising from the consciousness of her own enlarged views, contrasted with the pitiful littleness of his. "It is easy enough to see the sort of way you would take, in order to keep your children back in the world, and prevent them from rising a single peg higher than you have managed to do yourself. But *my* children have too much of their mother in them to bear it, and so you will find, sir. It may, perhaps, be in your power to prevent the great, the unhopd-for advantages with which they are now surrounded from doing them any real good. I dare say it may be in your power to do that. But it is not in your power, nor ever will be, to turn them back again into poor tame ignorant clods, contented with having as much food as they want, and clothes enough to keep them warm. You'll never be able to turn the chosen friends of nobles and princesses into such animals as that ; and the consequence of your making a stand against drawing for sufficient money for the necessary expenses of our present station in life will be following our children to an early grave. I don't mean to talk about myself. I know you don't consider me now of much consequence to anybody. You have taken it into your poor old head that nobody knows anything but yourself, and you may soon dance over my grave by way of proving you are right." At this point, indignation and contempt gave way to grief, and Mrs. Roberts drew out her pocket-handkerchief, and wept violently.

"Sarah !" said her husband, after a short sharp struggle with his common sense, which was beat out of the field by his habitual deference and habitual affection for his wife, "Sarah !" he said, "I am many years older than you, and if one of us is doomed to die of a broken heart, it had better be me. But just let me say one last word, and then go on as you think best. My belief is that we shall all be ruined—downright, positively ruined—by the trying to live among all these fine folks. But don't cry any more, Sarah, don't cry. I am willing to do whatever you like. I am sure you mean to do everything for the best, my dear, and if it don't answer, why I am sure it won't be the fault of your will ; so don't cry, Sarah ! and you shan't find that I'll plague you with my dismal forebodings any more."

"Keep but your word in that, my dear Roberts," she replied with sudden animation, and raising herself on tip-toe to give him a kiss, "keep but your word in that, and depend upon it that

everything will go well, and we never shall have any difference between us again."

The good man sighed, but not ostentatiously, returned his wife's kiss very kindly, and then threw open the door for her to pass. But Mrs. Roberts was at that identical moment very nearly penniless; the large supply drawn for before they quitted Baden having been so nearly absorbed by the unexpected amount of the various claims upon her, as barely to leave sufficient for the journey; the two hundred pounds which she had calculated would remain, with which to commence their Roman campaign, having so completely vanished as scarcely to have left a trace even on her memory. She felt, therefore, that she should by no means be doing her duty to herself and her dear children, if she omitted the present very favourable opportunity of obtaining a further supply, and she therefore said, in a pleasant, confidential tone, which could not fail of being soothing to the feelings of her husband, who had not of late been treated with much attention by his greatly occupied family,—

"Nay, shut the door again, dear Roberts. I have a hundred things that I want to say to you, and lately you have always seemed so poorly, and disinclined to talk, that I have not liked to trouble you; but I wish to tell you, my dear, that you are quite mistaken about Edward's match with Bertha being off. It never was so perfectly certain as it is at this moment. She is an odd-tempered girl, I won't deny that, and if Edward was a common sort of character, I might perhaps have some anxiety about his being happy with her. But he is so very superior, and has such uncommon powers of mind, and knows how to influence those he lives with in such an extraordinary manner, that I feel no alarm on that score. So there you may be easy, my dear; and as to the girls, they have only to be seen! In your life you never beheld anything like the fuss that was made with them last night! There were no less than five noblemen and one prince that desired to be introduced to them; and the ladies of the very highest rank that desired to make my acquaintance, was really something quite extraordinary! But of course you know that though we may be quite sure that all this sort of thing must sooner or later lead to the permanent establishment of our dear children in the exalted station of life for which they are evidently so peculiarly qualified—though we cannot with any reasonable use of our eyes and understanding doubt this final result, it is impossible to deny that a little present ready money is absolutely necessary; and what I feel, Roberts, is that we ought to be thankful to Providence—very thankful indeed—that enabled you, by a little steady industry and perseverance, to realize enough to enable us to conquer what I have no doubt has often proved an insuperable difficulty to many people. And it is this consideration, my dear Roberts, that ought

now and always to prevent your feeling any repugnance for drawing for the necessary supplies. Trust me, my dear, it will all come back to you, and with interest. I did not mean to say anything about it till to-morrow, because we have several calls to make to-day, but as we are upon the subject, it will save us both trouble if you will give me a draft now. I understand that if people can show that they have any decent introductions here, Torlonia will cash a draft at sight, and I am sure that will be monstrous convenient just now, for the journey has left me quite dry. Let it be five hundred, Roberts, will you, dear? Less than that will really be of no use at all."

"But don't you expect a remittance from Miss Harrington's aunt, my dear?" said Mr. Roberts, holding the pen she had given him suspended over the paper. "If I don't mistake, it is several weeks behindhand."

"What, Bertha's hundred pounds for this current quarter? Oh no! we got that just before we set off from Baden; and lucky it was that we did, for we never should have got here without it. But do write the draft, my dear Roberts, will you? The poor dear girls will think that I have quite forgotten them."

Mr. Roberts readjusted the paper before him, dipped the pen in the ink, and wrote the draft for the sum named. But before he signed his name to it he paused, and seemed for a minute or two deeply absorbed in thought. During this interval the countenance of his wife became greatly overclouded, and a look of red and resolute purpose succeeded to the radiant good humour it had before exhibited. After the pause described, Mr. Roberts, pushing the paper a little away from him, looked up in the face of his wife. If any thought of remonstrance still lingered in his mind, it vanished as he did so, and in the next moment his name was subscribed to the draft. The next time that the voice of Mr. Roberts was heard to utter a command, it pronounced these words to his youngest daughter: "Maria, order the man-servant to let me have hot-water, sugar, and brandy brought to me every evening before he goes out with the carriage." And this order was given and obeyed.

CHAPTER XLIII.

WHILE the affairs of Mrs. Roberts and her children went on thus prosperously at Rome, those of Mr. Roberts and Miss Harrington, who were both left pretty much to their own devices, were managed on principles diametrically opposite to any which regulated the movements of the rest of the family, but which resembled each other very closely. For while Mrs. and the two Miss Robertses, together with Mr. Edward Roberts, were making the most vehement exertions, and with great success, to pass as many hours of their existence as possible in a crowd, Mr. Roberts and Miss Harrington limited their quieter labours to the endeavour of

keeping themselves in their separate little spheres as much alone as possible.

As to Mr. Roberts, poor man! he had made up his mind to live peaceably, trouble nobody, and trust to chance for what was to come next. He had meditated a good deal, before he had reached this state of mind, on the two very different terminations predicted by himself and his wife to the race they were running. He thought it most likely that his wife would stop short before she had spent quite all that he had belonging to him, and that the best thing he could do would be to prepare himself for the manner of life which he thought likely, at no very great distance of time, to follow that which they were pursuing at present. He positively refused to have either a new coat or a new hat, both which articles were certainly wanting to render his appearance fit for exhibition. He freely acknowledged this to be the case, but brought the argument to a conclusion by declaring that he did not like to go into company, and therefore should always stay at home. The resolution thus proclaimed was not perhaps altogether disagreeable to his family, and Mrs. Roberts did not look at all angry as she replied, "Well, my dear, if you feel *that*, I don't see any use in the world in dragging you about, and keeping you out of your bed, when I dare say it would be a great deal better for your health that you should be in it. And if that's settled, you are quite right about not having a coat, for Heaven knows it is the duty of both of us to spare everything we can in the way of expense, just at the very time that the dear children are wanting every farthing we can manage to spend, in order to prevent their losing the great advantages of what we are doing for them."

"Very well, Sarah, then we are agreed about that," said Mr. Roberts in reply, and not wishing to hear any more just then of the "great advantages" of which he had already heard so much, he left the room as he spoke. It was within an hour or two of this conversation that Mr. Roberts gave the order for the constant supply of brandy-and-water which has been mentioned above; and those who had seen him as he stepped on board the steamboat on the Thames, rather less than eighteen months before, had they looked at him only one month after this new arrangement had taken place, would either not have recognized him at all, or would have imagined that he must be under the influence of some slow-working poison, which, though it did not appear immediately to threaten his existence, must sooner or later bring him to the grave.

The similarity which has been alluded to between the mode of life of Mr. Roberts and that of Miss Harrington, did not extend to the brandy-and-water—indeed, it chiefly consisted in the determination of both not to join in the festivities to which the rest of the family were devoting themselves. It could hardly be expected, perhaps, that any girl of seventeen could be thrust out from her natural home in the way Bertha Harrington had been, and thrown

among strangers, without graver consideration given to their fitness for the charge than had been deemed necessary in her case, without some injurious effect arising from it. Bertha was still a pure-minded, affectionate, unaffected girl, but she had become much too indifferent to the opinion of others (with the exception at least of one single individual), and too much disposed to believe that the only thing necessary to be attended to in the disposal of her time, at least for the present, was her own amusement, or, as she would have herself called it, her own improvement. The extreme repugnance with which the style and manners of the Roberts' race had inspired her, led her to believe that the first thing needful in the regulation of her own conduct was to keep out of their way; and to achieve this she certainly permitted herself a degree of independence in her proceedings, which could not safely be received as admissible in any code of young-lady-like regulations. Of all the books treating of Rome and its marvels, which she had chanced to get hold of, the "Corinne" of Madame de Staël had made the deepest impression. It was in fact her hand-book, her *vade mecum*, her delight. As to all the latter part of it, she had read it once, wept heartily, classed the hero in her mind as one of the vilest of the human race, and then turned back to the immortal pages sacred to Rome. To see all that Corinne saw was the first wish of her heart, and the first resolve of her bold young spirit. She blushed in her solitary chamber, as she caught herself wishing that her cousin William was there to go everywhere with her, as wicked Lord Neville had done with Corinne—and then she almost exclaimed aloud at the sin of letting such a false wretch as Neville enter her thoughts in connexion with Vincent. And then she took herself very severely to task for suffering herself to wish for her cousin William at all. That, all goodness and all kindness as he had been to her, he did not wish to be with her was quite plain; and she only began to flatter herself that she was not, respecting her feelings for him, exactly everything that she should most have hated to be, when it occurred to her that, after all, there was nothing perhaps in the world that she should really and truly like so well as hiring a valet-de-place to be in constant attendance upon her every morning. It required some exertion of the independent spirit to which her peculiar circumstances had given birth to enable her to do this. Money she had at her command to a much greater extent than the Robertses were aware, for her mysterious father had commissioned Lady Morton, soon after her arrival at Baden, to transmit to her circulating bills to the amount of two hundred pounds, with an intimation that an equal sum would be added to her private income as long as she continued abroad. This sum was as yet untouched, and it was her purpose to make a visit to the banking establishment of Messrs. Torlonia part of one of her earliest excursions, under the protection of her intended valet-de-place. It took her a good while to decide upon

the best mode of obtaining this necessary attendant, but at length she determined to ask the master of the circulating library in the Piazza di Spagna if he could recommend such a person. To this library she had already found her way on foot; and by the aid of her very quiet dress, and a thick veil, she had managed to go and come (the distance was but short) without any misadventure whatever. Her application to the master of this little establishment was perfectly successful, as was also the request that she might meet the important person he recommended at his shop on the following day, in preference to his coming to her at the lodgings, which might lead to questionings and discussions that she wished to avoid. The meeting thus arranged took place with as little delay as possible, and the result enabled her to set forth the next day in a respectable-looking carriage provided by her new attendant, with "Corinne" in her hand, and all her soul in her eyes. But this masterly arrangement was not achieved without a vigorous attempt on the part of Mrs. Roberts to discover what the young lady was about. Conscientiously satisfied, indeed, that the alliance so happily secured for her with Edward must effectually protect her from any possible ill consequence arising from the gossiping of idle tongues, she would have deemed any interference with her profitable young boarder's whims as an act scarcely less sinful than suicide; and on this occasion, therefore, as well as on various former ones, she resolved to keep clear of any such wickedness.

But, to say truth, there were other grounds on which the daily sight of this independent carriage alarmed her. Bertha, as it may be remembered, had once hinted, upon being asked to contribute to the expense of the Baden carriage, that she conceived the four hundred per annum which was paid for her accommodation in Mrs. Roberts's family was intended to include it—a startling sort of reply, this, which had never been forgotten, and which had gone far towards establishing the very unusual degree of independence which the young lady enjoyed. And now, though it must be confessed that there was, in the self-assured step with which the youthful Bertha daily descended the stairs to her mysteriously obtained equipage, enough to alarm the most liberal-minded chaperon in existence; and though the extraordinary composure of manner with which she might be seen, day after day, to give her commands to her attentive valet-de-place as to the order of the morning's excursion, would naturally have suggested to most ladies holding the responsible position assumed by Mrs. Roberts, that it would be quite as well to know how she disposed of herself during these long mornings, she was vastly less anxious as to any personal risk which the presumptuous young lady might run by so unusual a mode of proceeding, than concerning the possibility that the "*idiot girl*," as she still sometimes affected to call her, might have taken it into her head to hire a carriage, horses, coachman, and footman, all upon the Robertses' credit. As to the first, it

would be easy enough for Edward to set all that to rights by-and-by ; but as to the last, she conscientiously felt it to be her own especial duty to obtain information.

When this alarming possibility first suggested itself, the ample countenance of Mrs. Roberts glowed from forehead to chin, and from ear to ear. It was certainly very delightful to drive about in the enjoyment of the unrestrained conversation of her own children, but she felt that the disagreeable presence of Bertha must be endured by them all, if the annoyance was only to be avoided by having to pay for a second carriage. The very earliest possible opportunity was seized by Mrs. Roberts for a tête-à-tête with Miss Harrington, in order to put this important matter upon a proper footing ; and although the obtaining this was no very easy thing, from the strict blockade by which Bertha contrived to protect her own room, and the very few minutes which, except while at table, she spent out of it, perseverance at length accomplished it, and Bertha found herself alone with Mrs. Roberts, and that lady stoutly standing between herself and the door.

"I beg your pardon, my dear," began the careful chaperon, "for stopping you, because you seem rather in a hurry, but I can't think I should be doing right, my dear Miss Bertha, if I didn't make any observation about your driving about the town all alone, as you do. You know, my dear, that there is always, of course, a place kept vacant and ready for you in our carriage whenever you like to go out, and I therefore really don't see what occasion you can possibly have for another."

Poor Bertha, even in the midst of her resolute and unflinching resolution to follow her own inclinations till her cousin Vincent should again be near enough to substitute his as her rule—indeed, even at the very moment that she braced her spirit to withstand every possible interference—felt that her much disliked hostess had some show of reason for remonstrance ;—and though her will was steadfast, her voice was gentle, as she replied ; "A carriage entirely at my command is necessary for me, Mrs. Roberts, because I want to go to places where nobody else wants to go : and I willingly pay for it myself, in order to avoid putting you and your daughters to the inconvenience of giving up any engagements of your own, in order to accomodate me."

"Well, my dear, I am sure it is impossible to say anything against that, because it is just the sort of genteel politeness which every one would like to see in a young lady of your rank and fortune. And I suppose, my dear, that you are quite sure that you have money enough to pay for it?"

Had Mrs. Roberts said one single syllable expressive of anxiety lest her young inmate might attract attention, and be deemed indiscreet, from the unprotected style in which she pursued her amusement, it might have gone far towards making the poor little girl more cautious in her proceedings, for there was no mixture of

audacity in her courage, no wish for exemption from any restraint for which she could feel respect ; but this allusion to her purse and its resources was most unfortunate : it offended and disgusted her in every way ; and more than ever determined to assume the entire disposal of herself till she should be happy enough to be again within reach of advice and protection which she could recognize as fit and proper, she brought the conversation to an abrupt conclusion by saying :—"Till I have given you some reason for it, madam, you have no right to suppose me capable of contracting debts which I am unable to pay ; and unless you wish me immediately to take measures for finding another home, you will do well to abstain from such interference with my conduct as may render my present abode intolerable to me."

"Dear me, Miss Harrington, I am sure I would not do anything of the kind, upon any account whatever ; on the contrary, my dear, I make it quite a point of honour towards your dear aunt to render all things as agreeable to you as possible."

Such was the placable rejoinder of Mrs. Roberts, having quietly listened to which, Bertha left the room with the air of a young princess graciously accepting an apology for some inadvertent offence offered to her greatness.

"Won't Master Edward bring her down a peg or two, I wonder ?" said Mrs. Roberts to her daughters, as she concluded her description of the above scene.

"If he does not," replied Agatha, "he will richly deserve to be brought down himself."

CHAPTER XLIV.

A SKILFUL pen, acting as a conductor to a tolerably observing mind, while engaged in ransacking Rome, might still find wherewithal to cover a good deal of paper in the genuine Corinne vein. But start not, gentle reader ! No such hazardous attempt is about to be made here, either for your delectation or annoyance ; it shall suffice to repeat that Bertha Harrington wearied not in the path she had chosen for herself, but persevered with an appetite that seemed to increase with what it fed on, in visiting and revisiting (and then coming back again to get another look) all the most cherished objects which that immortal museum contains.

Now, though it had been gravely debated in the Roberts family only a few short months before, whether Miss Harrington was handsome or ugly ; though she had been strongly suspected during that interval of being little better than an idiot in capacity ; and though, worst of all perhaps, she dressed with no other object than to make herself as little conspicuous as possible, she nevertheless did not quite escape observation. Had she indeed been less lovely than she really was, the manner in which she was perpetually seen by those who had the same pursuits as herself, rambling in solitary

enjoyment, and with no other protection than that afforded by an ordinary valet-de-place from one end of Rome to the other, could scarcely fail of drawing a good deal more attention than she was at all aware of. But so utterly ignorant was Bertha of all that an acquaintance with the world can teach, and which nothing else can, that she felt as snugly secure as if she had been shut up in cotton; and as she rarely looked at any man or woman, except such as were made of marble, it did not occur to her that the more insignificant portion of the creation formed of clay might, by possibility, take it into their poor mortal heads to look at her. This oversight on her part was unfortunate, as it exposed her to much that it would have been desirable she should avoid. More gay young eyes had looked at her, and more gay old ones too had taken the same direction, than it is at all necessary to enumerate: one single anecdote will suffice to show, to all whom it may concern, the danger of a young lady's fancying that she can take care of herself, without better assistance than that of a valet-de-place.

It happened that Bertha had worked up her fanciful young mind into a state of great enthusiasm for the Pantheon. There was something in its form and proportions, in the unwonted manner in which "thoughts commercing with the skies" might be followed by eyes wishing to commerce with them also, as well as in the contrast between its past and present dedication, which drew her again and again beneath its beautiful dome; and often as she drove along the Via Sacra, she never failed to give it a fond look, which very often led to an affectionately long visit. Twice had her accomplished valet-de-place followed her into the building, and twice followed her round it, reciting all the records concerning it, which it is so perfectly necessary for an unlearned lady to hear once, but so exceedingly annoying to listen to a second time. On her first visit she heard him with great attention; but during the second, her manner so evidently showed this intelligent official that his antiquarian lore was no longer required, that when she entered the building for the third time, he reposed himself on the step of the carriage as long as she stayed. This man, however, though professionally devoted to time past, was not so entirely withdrawn from time present as not to remark the singularity of his young mistress's mode of life. He had lived long enough in the world to know, that when pretty young ladies are in the habit of appearing abroad without any protection at all, they are generally supposed to be living under the especial protection of some person in particular. Nor did this experienced individual stop here in his conjectures respecting his juvenile patroness. If the solitary carriage, together with the many Roman memorials in the purchase of which she indulged herself, convinced him that she *had* one particular "friend," the remarkable manner in which she haunted St. Peter's, the Pantheon, the Vatican, and so forth, evidently after her first visit to each) preferring his absence to his presence,

convinced him quite as firmly, that she either had, or intended to have, more than one.

It was then in front of the majestic portico of her favourite Pantheon, that the following dialogue took place, which will show clearly enough the sort of position in which the heiress of Sir Christopher Harrington had contrived to place herself, while strenuously endeavouring, with what she believed to be very praiseworthy resolution, to find consolation in her independence, for the desolate exile in which she seemed doomed to live.

Luigi Mondorlo had not been reading his "Ariosto" on the step of Miss Harrington's carriage for above half an hour on the fourth day that he had attended her to this admired edifice, when a young Englishman of rather distinguished manner and appearance came out of it, and, having looked with somewhat of a scrutinizing glance at the equipage for a minute or two, addressed him in pretty good Italian to the following effect:—

"I think I know your face, my good fellow. If I am not mistaken, you are just the sort of person I am looking after for a friend of mine. Are you likely to be long engaged with the lady you are attending upon now?"

Mondorlo looked up at him with the keen quick glance of an Italian eye, and more than half smiled as he replied, "How does the signor know that I am in attendance upon any lady at all?"

The young Englishman returned the glance and the smile too, as he answered, "I believe you Italians think that no men have eyes but yourselves. But will you be pleased to answer my question?"

"Certainly," replied the man, rising, "to the best of my knowledge I will answer it. I intend to remain in my present situation as long as the lady requires my services. But how long that may be I do not know. When she dismisses me, it will be an honour to be employed by the signor."

"Very well, then, you must give me your name and address," rejoined the Englishman, "that I may know how to get at you."

"Many thanks, signor. My name is Luigi Mondorlo, and I am always to be heard of at the English library in the Piazza di Spagna," said the man.

Mr. Lawry, for such was his name, drew forth his tablets, and wrote the address.

"But how comes it, my good fellow," he resumed, "that such a clever, well-informed valet-de-place as you are—for I followed you and your party one day round the Vatican—how comes it, I say, that you should sit here amusing yourself with that queer-looking little book, instead of attending the young lady round the Pantheon?"

The man laughed. "She has been here so often, signor, that she has heard all I have got to say about it, and would be as tired of hearing it all over again, I suppose, as I should be of saying it," he replied.

"What do you think makes her come here so often?" demanded Mr. Lawry.

"That is no business of mine," replied Luigi.

"Business? No, certainly. The answering such a question as mine has nothing very like business in it. But unless she pays you, and well too, for holding your tongue, she cannot reasonably expect that you should stand for hours together waiting upon her pleasure, without speaking a word to any one that passes by. But perhaps she *does* pay you well for keeping her secrets. Have I guessed rightly?"

"No, indeed, you have not, sir," replied the man, yawning. "She does not seem much to care who knows of her goings on. I never saw her pretend to make the least mystery or concealment about anything she does, except just putting down her veil as she goes in and comes out of the places."

"Well, to be sure, that is strange enough," returned Mr. Lawry; "for of course, by your manner of speaking, you know that there are some things she does that she would not very well like every body to know."

"Why, I have got no very good right to say so either," said the man, looking frankly up in the face of the questioner; "only you know, that when a young lady is living in the way that of course she lives in, the gentlemen they depend upon would not, in the general way, quite like that she should keep loitering about as this one does, in all the most quiet places. We don't want any conjuror to tell us how young ladies are amusing themselves when they do that."

"What is the name of the gentleman she lives with?" said Mr. Lawry.

"I know not, on my word," replied the conscientious valet. "And I do not know her name either. She pays me every week herself, and I bring her the receipt for the carriage and horses too, and the *buono mano* to the coachman she gives herself. But I never had any occasion to ask for her name, or for that of the gentleman either—and so I never did, for I don't love English names, they are so difficult."

"Then it is an English gentleman she lives with?" said Mr. Lawry.

"Why, that I take to be a matter of course, sir, from the quantity of money she throws away in little bronzes and marbles, the miniature copies, you know, sir, of our great works. We never see that in any ladies that don't live under the protection of English gentlemen."

"And pray, my good Mr. Luigi Mondorlo," said the young Englishman, with sudden animation, "how do you know that she lives with any gentleman at all?"

The man laughed. "How do I know it?" he repeated. "You are a good many years younger than I am, signor, there is no doubt

of that, and yet I should have thought you were old enough to know that young ladies like my *padrona* do not wander about the churches, and galleries, and ruins, in the style she does, if they have anybody to take care of them *except* the gentleman they live with, unless they are just married indeed, and don't choose to take anybody about with them as yet. But that is not the case with my *padrona*, for the servants of the house always call her '*la signorina*.'

"But how comes it that you have never asked these servants of the house anything about her? If you had done this, you would not be driven to so much guess-work as you seem to be at present."

"Ecco!" exclaimed the man, laughing, "that is quite an English question, signor. The Roman people never think of making any inquiries of that sort. A gentleman may ask a lady a question, or a lady may ask a gentleman, for the private and particular satisfaction of either party—that is, provided they are not man and wife. But Rome would not be wide enough to contain its population, if such sort of questions as you suggest were to be set going among them. We are a peaceable people, signor, in these later days, whatever we might be formerly—peaceable in all ways; whether it be his Holiness or the Emperor that takes the government of the country upon him, or this noble gentleman, or that, takes the government of a lady, the wisest among the Romans look the other way, and say nothing."

"That may be all very wise and very convenient for you," replied the Englishman, condescendingly adopting the playful tone of the Italian, "but we manage all these matters very differently in our country."

"It may be so, signor," returned the valet-de-place, resuming his poetical studies. "But you will find, if you stay long enough among us, that we understand all about the ladies, at least quite as well as you do; and that my pretty *padrona* is just the sort of young lady I take her to be, notwithstanding her looking as shy and as pale as a nun."

"I dare say you are right, my fine Roman," returned Lawry, chucking half a scudo at him; and the young Englishman walked off, without a doubt in poor Bertha's favour remaining on his mind, but not without something like a sigh, that an English woman, and with such a pair of eyes too, should so early have placed herself beyond the reach even of a conjecture that might save her from condemnation.

CHAPTER XLV.

MRS. ROBERTS now found herself in a vastly more magnificent circle than she had ever been before, and her elevation of mind kept pace with her elevation of position. In Paris, the joint-stock establishment of the ladies Morton and Foreton had been the

brightest star in the constellation, in which it was her glory to move about like a sort of vapour, occasionally catching and throwing back the rays that fell upon her. At Baden-Baden, she most assuredly made a gigantic step in advance; for there it was no reflected light that she gave back from the pre-eminent Balcony House, for the Lynberry and the Montgomery might, in one sense at least, have signed themselves, like Hamlet, more hers than their own, and a princess, and no less, had been one of her daily and almost familiar associates. But the transition from Baden-Baden to Rome was like darting from the firmament where the nearer stars seem to "inhabit heaven lax," into the bright vortex of the milky way. The two letters of introduction, together with the unshrinking display of personal attraction in the young ladies, the improving impudence and moustaches of their handsome brother, and the skilful restoration of all the silks and satins which the speculative spirit of their mother had collected for them all, produced a far greater splendour of success than any of them, even the eagle-hearted Agatha herself, had ever dreamed of. Amidst the numerous and motley throng to which they were now admitted, there were some who had not much better right to take a place with princes than herself; and among these were a certain Mrs. and Miss Stapleford, in whose society Mrs. Roberts found great attraction, though the impossibility of discovering anything Right Honourable in their lineage gave her an occasional qualm of conscience, from feeling that the time wasted in their society might have been put to profit in wedging herself in among the magnificent-sounding titles which made sweet and now perpetual music in her ears on all sides. These scruples, however, were prevented from becoming any serious restraint upon the acquaintance, in consequence of her perceiving that, beyond the shadow of a doubt, Mrs. and Miss Stapleford knew a great many more princes and princesses than she did; and the question as to whether they might venture to permit the intimate tone assumed by these ladies to them (and to everybody else), which was brought rather formally under discussion before the select committee formed by Mrs. Roberts, her daughters, and her son, was decided *nem con.* in their favour. This important conversation terminated by the following remarks from the various parties engaged in it, all of which carried so much weight that no doubts were ever again suggested on the subject.

"There is no denying, you know, that let them be what they will themselves, the Staplefords are more really intimate with all the highest titles here than any other people whatever, excepting just the first set among themselves: so at any rate there can be no danger of one's doing oneself harm by going on with them."

"That's quite true, isn't it, Edward?" demanded Maria, turning to her brother, who was, as usual, arranging his various capillary treasures to the best advantage before the looking-glass.

"True as gospel," he replied, with an expressive grimace, indicative of mixed terror and aversion; "if the girl were not so devilishly ugly, I should pass an hour in their drawing-room every day of my life. There is not a thing happens in Rome that the old one (I don't mean the devil, but the old woman)—there is nothing either said or done in Rome that she does not know, and it is monstrously convenient to have such a scandalous chronicler to keep one *au courant*. But I can't stand that Miss Barbara with her red nose and all her talents; but her red nose can't make any difference, you know, to you and the girls, and therefore I decidedly vote for your cultivating the acquaintance."

"The acquaintance will be cultivated, you may depend upon it, Edward; I will undertake that on my own individual account. It is impossible to live in Rome without having access to Barbara Stapleford's caricatures."

These words, spoken in the authoritative voice of Agatha, were quite sufficient to decide the question, and what followed were mere desultory remarks, which could add nothing to the weight of what had already been uttered. Maria, for instance, asked Edward playfully, which he would rather flirt with for a whole evening, Miss Stapleford, or Bertha Harrington?

"Oh, Miss Stapleford, ten thousand times over!" he replied. "And yet, Maria," he added, with an expressive glance at his mother, "I fully intend that the detestable Bertha shall be Mrs. Edward Fitzherbert Roberts before the expiration of many weeks. You stare, girls; but I am quite in earnest, I promise you; so take care to provide yourselves with white satins, and all the rest of it."

The young ladies laughed, and their mamma chuckled, and then the family conclave was broken up—by the young man's going to meet a set of newly-made intimate friends, who had entered into a combination to take in the knowing ones at the next races—by Maria's retiring to her sleeping and robing apartment, for the purpose of composing some new mask in which to entangle hearts in the evening—by Agatha's going to prepare for the carriage which was to convey her to the Princess Yabiolporakiosky—and by Mrs. Roberts setting off on foot to pay an early visit in the most sociable and unceremonious manner possible to the Staplefords.

That Mrs. Roberts was admitted to them now, and at all other times and seasons whenever she presented herself, was solely owing to the wish and will of Miss Barbara. Mrs. Stapleford was a person, who though she ate, drank, and slept well and sufficiently, yet nevertheless seemed to live upon talking. At any rate, nobody acquainted with her could doubt that if this primal enjoyment were withdrawn from her, she must perish. As to her daughter, Mrs. Stapleford had long known that it was perfectly useless to attempt talking to her; the young lady had told her many years ago (Miss Barbara was thirty-three years old) that she never did,

and never should hear a single word that was addressed to her while she was drawing ; and as, when at home, she never did anything else, her mother found it necessary to provide herself with listeners among her friends and acquaintance ; and fortunately this was by no means difficult, for Mrs. Stapleford took such incessant pains to obtain the very earliest information of everything that was going on in Rome, from the Vatican to the diligence-office, that a great many people, both ladies and gentlemen, liked to begin the day by listening to her, and it was doubtless owing to this luxurious plenitude of morning visitors that Mrs. Stapleford had by degrees grown a little, though not very fastidious ; and being so, she felt that the vast mass of information she had to bestow, the invaluable *catalogue raisonné* of dresses, the unquestionable information she ever possessed of all the most important acts of legislation proceeding from the Propaganda, and the little hints of heavy scandals which she sprinkled as she went, like Cayenne pepper giving flavour and animation to a rich ragout, altogether rendered her discourse worthy of more distinguished ears than those of Mrs. Roberts. But on this point the steadfast will of her daughter Barbara silenced all opposition. The life of this decidedly clever young lady was chiefly spent in studying the features, expression, and attitudes of all her acquaintance, in sketching admirable caricature portraits of them, and for ever keeping awake the curiosity of the Roman world, by the most capricious showing and hiding that ever lady artist indulged in ; which is saying a good deal both for the courage and the reserve of her exhibitions. All who were at that time included in the motley mass which constituted the Anglo-Roman *beau monde*, became in succession the subjects of her often cruel, but always clever pencil ; but though scarcely a single individual was entirely overlooked, the lady had her favourites, and there were some subjects to which she returned again and again, with ever increasing pleasure and ever improving fidelity. The manner in which Mrs. Roberts inhaled, and sucked in, as it were, all her mother's long stories, had in it a sort of charm for her of which she never seemed to weary, and it was for this reason that she was never greeted with a "*non receve*," unless some still greater favourite, or some very particularly precious group, chanced to be in possession of the Stapleford boudoir.

Mrs. Roberts was assuredly very far from guessing the cause of this preference, but its value to her was enormous ; a fact which may easily be made evident by giving you a specimen of the conversation enjoyed by her during the visit of a single morning. The preceding evening, or rather night, had been passed by all the world at a ball given by one of the few Roman princes who still retain their state and revenues unimpaired. It had been crowded and magnificent, and kept up to so late an hour as to have been con-

sidered altogether the most delightful *fête* that had been given that year.

"Yes, ma'am, it was quite perfect," said Mrs. Stapleford, in reply to a speech of Mrs. Roberts, expressive of her admiration. "Nobody knows how to do these things like the Orinis. But yet it is a pity too, ma'am, isn't it, to see such abominable goings on as we witnessed last night! Did you ever see anything like it in your life?"

Miss Barbara gave one glance at the features of the visitor as this question was asked, and her pencil moved with the quick, sure, eager vivacity of inspiration.

"Dear me!" replied Mrs. Roberts, literally trembling with eagerness, "I was so taken up with my daughters, and being introduced to all the gentlemen that wanted to dance with them, that I really do not believe I saw what you allude to, and I should be greatly obliged if you would have the great kindness to tell me about it. It will be quite a charity, you know, my dear Mrs. Stapleford, for it is such a great disadvantage for the mother of a family not to know a little what is going on."

"You are quite right there, ma'am," returned Mrs. Stapleford. "I don't know anything more dangerous than going about everywhere as you do, and taking girls too, without knowing, as you say, what's going on. I am sure I would not refuse the worst enemy I have, if he asked the same thing of me."

"Indeed, Mrs. Stapleford, you are very, *very* kind," returned Mrs. Roberts, her countenance glowing with affectionate gratitude; "I do assure you that you will be doing me a great deal of real service, for it is quite dangerous not to know who one ought to speak to, and who one ought not."

"Oh, as to speaking and not speaking, that is rather an old-fashioned notion, ma'am. However, that doesn't signify. What I was alluding to was the spick-and-span new flirtation which the Princess Bornorino is getting up with that poor silly boy, Belvolto."

"With whom, ma'am?" said Mrs. Roberts, staring.

"The Duke de Belvolto," returned Mrs. Stapleford, taking a large pinch of snuff.

It was a good while since Mrs. Roberts had felt herself more completely aware of her own rapid elevation than at that moment. It *was* delightful to hear a person with whom she was so very intimate call a duke a "poor silly boy." But she felt she owed it to herself, and to her station in society, to take the same tone, and she exclaimed with a sigh, "Poor fellow!"

"Poor fellow, indeed! I have no patience with him," returned her friend. "There was the poor dear Princess Marianne looking as white as a sheet."

"Was she indeed?" returned Mrs. Roberts, not choosing to confess her total ignorance as to the person meant; the only Princess

Marianne she had ever heard of being the wife of an accomplished gentleman, who appeared greatly devoted to her.

"I don't know where your eyes could have been, ma'am, if you did not see that," returned Mrs. Stapleford. "I saw two ladies offer her their smelling-bottles, and her dear kind husband, who really is the best creature in the world, brought her a chair, took her fan out of her hand and fanned her, standing carefully all the time, dear good soul! so as to prevent her seeing Belvolto and Bornorino. I am sure I don't wonder at the Countess Sophia's doating so much upon that man as she does; he really deserves it. So full of feeling and delicacy!"

Poor Mrs. Roberts! Never had she felt herself so deplorably behindhand; and had a Society for the Propagation of Useful Knowledge been established at Rome, and her opinion asked as to who should be made president, she would have vociferated the name of Mrs. Stapleford with the whole strength of her lungs.

Deeply thankful, however, as she felt for the sort of special providence which seemed to have thrown her into the society of this highly-informed individual, she was greatly at a loss how best to profit by it. The argument about proving herself unknown, though perhaps not so familiarly known to her as a poetical saw as it may be to some others, was nevertheless impressed upon her mind as cogently, by the unassisted force of her own sagacity; and she by no means liked to place herself in the category of the excluded ignorant, and who know not *that* which was of *salon* notoriety to all admitted within the magic circle of "*the society of Rome*." Ten thousand times rather would she have been suspected of not knowing whether the sun went round the earth, or the earth round the sun, than be supposed more ignorant than other people concerning the intrigues going on around her. Was she then to remain ignorant in order to avoid appearing so? Oh no! for her dear children's sake she would risk everything rather than suffer them again to enter a ball-room without understanding better than they did at present, dear creatures! what was the real meaning of the most interesting occurrence they were likely to witness there. But though resolutely determined to learn all she could, let it cost what it might from the humiliating confession of ignorance, she exerted all her skill to avoid exposure as much as possible.

"How much more interesting society must be to you, my dear Mrs. Stapleford," she said, "than to those who have not known the individuals who compose it so long as you have done!"

"Long?" returned Mrs. Stapleford. "Bless you, ma'am, I have not known the most amusing part of them long. Most of the people here come and go like the figures in a magic lantern. But of course one can't live intimately among them at all without finding out what they are about. The Princess Bornorino, for in-

stance, who made herself so abominably conspicuous last night with the Belvolto, has not been here for above two months this year, and it is four years ago since her last visit, and then she almost shut herself up, excepting just for the best balls, in order to enjoy the society of Count Romofkin ; and she would have seen little enough of him if she had not, poor thing ! for Romofkin spent his life in smoking."

"She seems to have managed very well, however, with all these little affairs" (Mrs. Roberts had already learned to speak with moderation and discretion on all such subjects), "for we meet her everywhere."

"Meet her everywhere ? To be sure you do," returned Mrs. Stapleford, staring at her with a look of great astonishment.

"And always in the very best set," added Mrs. Roberts gaily.

"Always in the best set ! Good gracious, to be sure you do," rejoined Mrs. Stapleford ; "what *do* you mean, ma'am ?"

"Oh ! merely, you know, that all the very best people seem always more intimate with the Princess Bornorino than with almost any one else ; and that, shows, does it not, that nobody thinks the worse of her for having so many lovers ?"

"Think the worse of her ! Oh dear !" and here Mrs. Stapleford laughed a funny little laugh, and took a very large pinch of snuff.

Mrs. Roberts was greatly vexed. She saw at once that she did not stand high in the estimation of her companion as a woman of fashion—but she boldly resolved not to desert herself at this trying moment, and said with a very respectable degree of ease, "I was only alluding to what you said about her conduct being abominable last night."

"And so it was abominable, ma'am. You don't suppose I mean to defend her for having turned off at a moment's warning the Duke di Torno, whom every one allows to be one of the most admirable people in Rome, in order to turn the head of the Belvolto, who is devoted, as everybody knows, to the Princess Marianne Contorina ? Besides, the whole thing was done in so abominable a manner, without the slightest consideration for Marianne, or a shadow of proper feeling towards Di Torno. It is quite too bad. I am excessively angry with her, and so I shall tell her, you may depend upon it. She bears everything from me ; but as to your fancying, my poor dear lady ! that people are to leave off speaking to her, that's quite a mistake, and won't do at all, I assure you. But it is very likely, I think, that you don't exactly understand how completely the Bornorino is the fashion. You have a great loss, ma'am, in not being acquainted with her."

"I am sure, my dear Mrs. Stapleford, it is not my fault," replied Mrs. Roberts. "There is nothing in the whole world I should like so much as being introduced to her ; and my daughters, too, would be delighted to cultivate her acquaintance."

"Well, ma'am," returned the obliging Mrs. Stapleford, "I shall

have no objection to introduce, if I should happen to have an opportunity. She is going to give a fancy ball during the carnival, and I dare say she would like to have your girls very well."

"A thousand and a thousand thanks, my dearest Mrs. Stapleford," returned the happy mother, in an ecstasy of gratitude. "You may depend upon it we shall make an opportunity. But here comes a whole party of ladies—I really must make way for them—good bye, good bye—don't get up, pray! I dare not say good bye to Miss Barbara, for fear of interrupting her. What a wonderful clever creature she is, Mrs. Stapleford! How I do wish she would let me see her drawing some day!"

"I will show you one now if you like it," said Mrs. Stapleford, turning towards her the paper on which she had been occupied.

"Dear me! how like your mamma that is! But who is the other person? A fancy figure, I suppose. What very long ears you have given her, my dear! There is some fun about it, I dare say, but I never saw anybody like it, so I can't find it out."

Mrs. Roberts then took her leave, and walked home again to her lodgings, where she impatiently awaited the return of her daughters, neither of them being at home; her whole soul so full of all she had heard, as well as of the promised introduction, that it was exceedingly painful to her to be obliged to sit down and sew in silence.

CHAPTER XLVI.

MANY weeks passed away without producing any great change or material variety in the state of affairs as already described. Bertha Harrington had become better acquainted with Rome than one traveller in ten thousand, and the Robertses were running the race that so many of the same species have run before them. The difference between the one mode of life and the other was certainly very great, considering that the parties inhabited the same domicile, and were members of the same family. Another difference between them arose from the fact, that every day which passed added to Bertha's wish for the arrival of her cousin, whose letters were much shorter and much less frequent than she had expected; while every day rendered both the tender Maria and the high-minded Agatha more resigned to the prolonged absence of the two gentlemen with whom he was associated. The even tenor of Miss Harrington's life was, however, at length varied by an adventure, and a very startling one. The religious feelings which had been impressed on the mind of this young girl by her excellent mother were equally simple and sincere. Never, perhaps, were prayers uttered with more purity of spirit or more undoubting faith than those daily breathed by her in the solitude of her chamber, and at the weekly assembling of her tacitly tolerated fellow-worshippers outside the gates of Rome. But in these days of speculative devo-

tion, when all men, all women, and almost all children, seemed called upon to decide upon contested points of doctrine and discipline, the quiet, deeply-fixed piety of Bertha, though most truly it had grown with her growth and strengthened with her strength, might have been mistaken by superficial observers for indifference rather than zeal. But they would have been mistaken. The first feelings which were awakened in her on looking about her at Rome were those connected with an instinctive and almost passionate love for the fine arts, and the fresh impressions left by the eager perusal of history, which had made a prominent feature in her education. But it was not long before the religious aspect of Rome, as displayed to the eyes of even the most careless observer, attracted her attention. The prodigious number of churches, the astounding splendour of some among them, and the multitudes of priests which thronged the streets, produced a sensation of awe, mingled with curiosity. Young as she was, however, Bertha Harrington was not one of those persons who are in danger of changing either the faith or the form of the religion which, from their earliest days of consciousness, has been the object of their deepest reverence, by looking at the pompous prelacy of Rome. She was made of other stuff. But she was interested greatly in watching the external worship of the church from which her own had seceded ; and with the most innocent unconsciousness of deciding for herself a point of such importance as to shake the tranquillity of man for ages past and ages yet to come, she thanked God very fervently for having been born in England. But still there was one feature of Romanism which had taken strong hold of her imagination. She thought there was something very delightful in the idea of a society of women withdrawing themselves from the idle vanities of life, and devoting themselves to holy thoughts and deeds of charity. And such a notion of the state and occupation of a sisterhood of cloistered nuns, though perhaps not exactly accordant with truth, must not be sneered at as a proof of folly in Bertha, for most assuredly it is that which most naturally suggests itself to an uncorrupted female mind upon considering the subject. But be this as it may, Bertha certainly did feel a great deal of interest about convents and nuns ; and one of the injunctions given to Luigi Mondorlo was, that he should do all he could to get her admitted within their walls, and enabled to witness their most interesting ceremonies. This was one of the many powers upon which Luigi particularly prided himself. He had a sister who was a nun ; and this, as he now declared to Bertha, and had often declared to other of his lady employers before, gave him greater facilities in gratifying all their wishes as to nuns and convents than were possessed by any other valet-de-place in Rome.

The adventure of Bertha which has been alluded to arose from this curiosity on her part. and the not quite vainly boasted power of gratifying it on his. He had long promised to obtain for her

an especially favourable place for seeing a lady receive the white veil, and on this occasion at least he kept his word faithfully, for having informed his holy sister that a young English lady, extremely rich and perfectly independent, had fixed her heart upon knowing all about it, and that he thought it very likely indeed that one day or other she would turn nun herself, permission was obtained from the abbess for her admission into the interior of the convent on the day appointed for the ceremony. Greatly to her satisfaction, therefore, she was conducted into the parlour where the nuns were permitted to stand on one side of a grated aperture, and converse with such friends as were licensed to visit them, who were stationed on the other. Bertha modestly seated herself as near this grating as she conveniently could, without interfering with the approach of the visitors, who each in succession were permitted to hold a few minutes' conversation with some near relative or connection within the cloister. Several pair of fine black eyes, seen by no means to a disadvantage under the white band that crossed the forehead, had more or less interested Bertha, according to their beauty or their expression, when a figure approached the grating, whose dress, though almost equally monastic with that of the sisters who had preceded her, was without the speaking accompaniment of the veil. This difference in her attire so much attracted the attention of Bertha, that for a moment she did not look at her features; but when, that moment being past, she looked in her face, she suddenly lost all command of herself, started from her chair, and uttered a loud scream. And another moment made it evident to the startled females on both sides of the grating, that the individual who had caused this vehement emotion shared it also. She uttered a deep groan, took a faltering step or two backward from the grating, and fell fainting into the arms of the sisters who were crowding the space behind her. Some of the ladies who occupied the parlour approached the pale and trembling Bertha, offered her numerous smelling-bottles, and presently obtained for her a glass of water. Their attention produced the desired effect, the cheeks and lips of Bertha resumed their natural colour, and she recovered herself sufficiently to thank them, and to say, that if her carriage was in waiting she would wish to return home immediately, as the unexpected sight of a person whom she had known under very painful circumstances had disturbed her spirits too much to permit her looking at the ceremony about to take place with the interest it deserved. But upon inquiry it was found that her carriage was not in waiting, nor her valet-de-place either, so that she was obliged to exert herself still further, and submit to the disagreeable necessity of accompanying the rest of the party to the chapel of the convent, which they entered by a private door, notice being given that the ceremony was about to begin.

A scene of great confusion; meanwhile, was going on in the

interior of the convent. The novice, whose features had so painfully affected the unfortunate Bertha, was conveyed to her cell in a state of insensibility, from which she was not restored till after long and repeated applications of the strongest remedies that the terrified sisters could apply ; and when at length she recovered her senses, their troubles were by no means at an end, for she began almost clamorously to demand the attendance of a confessor. At any other time such a requisition from an inmate of that house suffering under affliction either of body or mind would have met with immediate compliance, but now there was great difficulty, great demur.

"There are but just enough to do the service of the altar handsomely," said the stately Sister Eugenie, knitting her brows ; "and what will the lord cardinal think if the convent of the Santa Consolazione cannot command a proper attendance of officiating priests on such an occasion as this ?"

"I must, I must," exclaimed the novice, vehemently. "The loss of my soul will rest as an eternal burden upon yours, if you refuse me a confessor. I must—I must confess, and instantly, or it may be too late."

Persuaded from this last phrase that the novice believed herself to be dying, a feeling of terror took possession of those around her, lest indeed the last offices of the church should be denied her through their negligence or indifference. Even Sister Eugenie allowed that this was not a moment to stand upon ceremony, even though that ceremony concerned the splendour of the service about to be performed before the altar of La Santa Consolazione.

"Let Father Maurizio be brought hither instantly," she said ; "he will be still in the sacristy. Sister Clara," she added, addressing one of the elder females, "go you and see to it. It is a moment of peril when a house like this is open, even for this holiest of offices."

The summons thus sanctioned was immediately conveyed to Father Maurizio, who obeyed it without a moment's delay, for he was told that a dying novice required his aid. The holy sisters, who, notwithstanding the strong temptation to enter the gallery of their chapel, still continued in attendance at the bedside of the novice, all reverently left the room when the priest entered, and the confessor and his penitent were left alone. The confession was not a short one ; and when it was over, two or three of the good nuns, who still resisted their longing desire to enter the chapel, that they might attend their suffering sister in her hour of need, entered her cell, and found her, though certainly not in danger of immediate death, extremely pale, and still trembling violently from the agitation it was evident she had undergone.

The ceremony in the chapel, meanwhile, was proceeding with becoming pomp and solemnity ; and even Bertha, though still suffering from the unexpected shock of seeing a person whom she had

hoped never to behold again, forgot for a moment her own sorrows and sufferings as she gazed at the delicate-looking young creature, who had found strength to renounce all that this world has to offer of lovely, loving, and beloved, in the hope of obtaining a reward for the sacrifice in another. The exhortation pronounced, and the tremendous ceremony ended, the newly-made nun retired through a door that opened on one side of the altar, into the convent, where she was to find all that was left to her of earth ; and the company who had witnessed it began to disperse. Bertha too well knew the punctuality of Luigi to feel any doubt as to finding her carriage in attendance at the door of the church ; and thankful that she should so soon be restored to the solitude for which she was longing, she was anxiously endeavouring to make her way through the crowd, when she felt her arm gently touched by a hand that evidently had not come in contact with it by accident. She looked round and saw an elderly man in the dress of a Romish ecclesiastic, but not in his clerical vestments, who immediately addressed her in French, requesting that she would have the kindness to remain in the chapel for a few minutes, as he had a communication of great importance to make to her.

"To me, sir?" she said, turning extremely pale. "Can it be from her? Is it possible that she should seek any communication with me?"

"Your conjecture is evidently right, Miss Harrington," replied the priest. "You suppose that it is the unhappy Mathilde Labarre who has sent me to you, and you are not mistaken."

"Sir, sir, I cannot see her, indeed I cannot," cried Bertha, earnestly, though suffering herself to be led, or rather guided, by the priest, whose hand still rested on her arm, into the sacristy. "You cannot know—she cannot have told you—all the misery she has caused me. Oh, sir, for pity's sake, never let me look upon her more!"

"Pardon me, young lady, she has told me all," replied Father Maurice, "and I can too well understand your natural unwillingness to see her, to attempt persuading you to overcome it ; nor will it be necessary for the attainment of the very proper object that she had in view in giving me the commission which I am now executing. Sit down, Miss Harrington," continued the old man, kindly, as he set a chair for her.

"Though it will be less terrible for you to listen to me than to her, I am quite aware that the discussion cannot be entered upon at all without causing you great agitation, great suffering."

"I will hear everything that you shall tell me it is necessary I should hear," replied Bertha, touched by the tone of genuine compassion in which the old man addressed her. "I will hear everything, if you will only promise me that I shall not see her."

"I do promise you, Miss Harrington," he replied, "and in return, you must promise me, that, excepting to your father, you

will never repeat what I am now about to disclose. It was confided to me in all the sacred security of confession, and it is only permitted to reach you in the hope that it may tend to console you under your heavy affliction.”—"Console me?" repeated Bertha, with a shudder.—"Yes, Miss Harrington," replied the priest, "if all this unhappy woman has revealed to me be as true as I suppose it to be, you will find consolation—oh, great and lasting consolation—from what it is in my power to tell you. Will you give me the promise I require?"—"I will, sir," replied Bertha, solemnly. "I do promise you."—"You promise me never to reveal the circumstances I am going to state, except to your father," said the priest.—"I wish not to make any exception," returned Bertha, a crimson flush colouring her pale cheeks for a moment, and then leaving them apparently paler than before.—"You will thank me for the exception ere we part," said Father Maurice, looking at her kindly; "and charged with this condition, I again ask if you give me your promise?"

"I do," said Bertha.—"Let me spare you," resumed the priest, "all unnecessary minuteness of reference to the dreadful scenes which preceded your departure from your father's house. You were, and are, very young, to form such horrible conjectures respecting the origin of all you have endured, as I cannot but believe, from your agitation at the encounter with this guilty woman, you have done. You suspect Mathilde Labarre poisoned your mother?"

"Her maid suspected it, and she told me," said Bertha, speaking with difficulty.

"My miserable penitent supposed it was so," resumed Father Maurice: "but she supposed also that she was not the only person suspected by the maid—she supposed—"

Bertha uttered a faint shriek, and raised her hand as if to forbid his going further. "Oh, speak it not!" she cried. "Have pity on me! Let me go—let me go, and hide myself from everybody."

The old priest looked at her with an eye that spoke no want of feeling. "Do not believe," he replied, "that I would have detained you here for the sole purpose of reviving feelings which have made your young cheek, my daughter, paler than it ought to be. That a fearful crime has been committed, has been rightly guessed; but bless the mercy of God which permits you to know that your surviving parent had no share in it. Of great and grievous sins your unhappy father has been guilty, but of this he is as innocent as you are."

"Thank God!" cried Bertha, sinking on her knees, and raising her clasped hands to heaven. "Oh, praised and blessed be the Father of all mercy, that has taken this frightful weight from my heart! And you, a stranger, how can I ever thank you as I ought?" And here poor Bertha burst into a salutary flood of tears, of which every drop that fell seemed to give her relief.

The good Father Maurice proved his sympathy by letting them flow without interruption, but in truth it was partly that he might remove the drops from his own eyes, that he turned from her so completely ; and when he again approached, and offered his hand to raise her, she looked at him with a feeling of affectionate gratitude that could not be mistaken.

"Sit down for a moment, my dear child," he said, replacing her in the chair she had before occupied, "and tell me if you would wish that I should communicate any further particulars of her confession ? She has given me unrestricted permission to tell you all ; and may the earnestness of her wish to relieve your mind from the dreadful suspicion which she herself endeavoured to throw upon your father, together with the heavy penance she is to undergo," he added, crossing himself, "may it assist in reconciling her soul to God ! Tell me, my poor child, have you strength to listen to any further details ?"

Bertha paused for a moment ere she replied. Her heart sank within her at the idea of hearing any voice dwelling upon the dreadful theme which she had so often prayed, in secret and in silence, might be permitted by Heaven to pass from her memory as a dream—and as a delirious dream she had almost taught herself to believe it. There was a sort of filial impiety in suffering her mind to rest on the suspicions which the unguarded words of her mother's maid had awakened, that made her feel this effort to forget, or rather to render vague and uncertain, all that occurred on the dreadful night of her mother's death, as an imperious duty ; and much of the eagerness with which she pursued every occupation that had power to interest her mind arose from this. But still there lay at the bottom of her heart, though resolutely guarded from every voluntary movement of recollection, a dark and heavy load, which the words of the friendly confessor had removed in a degree that had, comparatively speaking, restored her to happiness ; and for a moment she was tempted to say, "No, no ! name it not again ! It is past, it is gone, it is over ! Oh, never let it come to me again !"

But before the words were spoken, she remembered how utterly alone she was—how totally beyond the reach of learning anything that might enable her to decide upon what she ought to do. Her position relative to her father was now completely changed. Not only had she in her secret thoughts accused him of having participated in the horrid crime which had deprived her of a mother, but she fully believed that his hateful paramour was still his companion ; and earnestly as she had laboured to drive all such thoughts from her mind, had been living under the torturing conviction that her mother's honoured place was usurped by her murderer. This it was which had made her endure the uncongenial home upon which she had been cast ; and the idea that any remonstrance to her aunt against it might lead to her being ac-

called to Castle Harrington, would have sufficed to chain her to it for ever. But now everything was changed—new duties seemed to arise before her eyes; but before she could take any step towards performing them, it was necessary that she should still learn much which it was possible the revelations of the repentant novice might have disclosed. Almost desperately, therefore, she resolved to hear all that the kind priest had to say, and again fervently thanking him for his goodness to her, she declared her wish to hear all that he thought it desirable she should know.

“You have decided wisely, my daughter,” he replied. “Painful as the theme must be, it is better that you lose not this opportunity of learning facts which probably may have an important influence on your future conduct. And yet it may not be needful, my dear young lady, that I should repeat to you at length all the disclosures of this unhappy woman. Unhappily you must already be aware that a sinful connection existed between her and your father. But deeply as this is to be deplored on his account, it is but just to tell you that the guilty confession to which I have been listening clearly proves that all the most appalling features of the crime belonged to Mathilde Labarre. She states that her principal reason for taking the situation of your governess was the knowledge she had obtained of your unfortunate father’s propensity to gallantry; that she soon obtained great influence over him, and flattering herself that it was much greater than she afterwards found it, she conceived the horrible scheme of removing your honoured mother, in the hope of being installed as the lawful mistress of the castle in her place. The first movement of your father’s mind on learning the dreadful catastrophe was to prevent the disclosure of Mademoiselle Labarre’s guilt. He might perhaps have been awake, even at that dreadful moment, to the probability that suspicion might fall upon himself. But, be this as it may, it is evident that he did all he could, and very skilfully too, to dissipate the suspicions which this sudden death occasioned. In this, it seems, he was quite successful—which, as she truly says, could not have been the case if he had been guilty of the imprudence of immediately parting with her. In a paroxysm of terror that seems to have seized upon her after the fatal catastrophe, she left the castle, but was brought back to it by your father, who enforced her remaining there for some weeks; but nothing, by her own account, could be more hostile than the terms on which they lived during this interval. His horror and detestation of the deed she had committed seemed to have rendered her presence a punishment almost proportioned to the sins of which he had been guilty; and she confesses that her first feelings of repentance arose from witnessing the passionate grief with which your father mourned for the wife he had injured and lost. May this repentance avail!” added the priest, crossing himself, “but

the death of your mother is not the only one that lies upon her soul. The only person whose evidence she had cause to fear was the personal attendant of the unfortunate lady, and to this poor woman she administered repeated doses of a slow but subtle poison, which gradually paralyzed her limbs, and ere long produced her death. I really believe that it is now only for your father's sake that she wishes the whole of this terrible history to be buried in eternal oblivion ; and she wished this last atrocious act to be communicated to you, that you may be aware of the importance of any indiscretion on your part, as no disclosure can be feared from any other quarter."

"Even without the promise given, it would be buried safely with me," replied Bertha, solemnly. "But can you tell me, sir, if you gathered from anything she said the motive of my unhappy father for keeping me thus estranged from my home?"

"Yes, Miss Harrington," answered Father Maurice, "I can answer that question distinctly. Your being sent off in the first instance was the natural result of the overwhelming horror in which he found himself plunged, and from which it was his first object to withdraw you ; and I suspect that your not being recalled arises from a want of courage on the part of your father, who dreads to see the child he has rendered motherless by his infidelity, though not by his hand."

"And must we then remain estranged for ever?" said Bertha, mournfully.

"I scarcely perhaps know enough to be a proper adviser," replied the good man, "but it seems to me that you would best perform your duty, young lady, by returning to him. Mademoiselle Labarre stated her belief that one source of the misery in which she saw him plunged arose from the idea that you might implicate him in the fearful crime that has rendered you both so desolate ; and if this be so, the power of removing this agonizing idea from his mind is reason sufficient to induce you to go to him, without thinking of any other ; though there may be many."

"I will go to him," said Bertha, rising with sudden energy ; "you are right, good father. I feel it at my heart, and that shall guide me. I have trusted to my poor head hitherto, and now it seems to me as if I had acted very ill. Alas ! alas ! my father must indeed be wretched ! May Heaven pardon me for having judged him wrongly !"

"Atone for it, my child, by breathing to his ear, and to his alone, the solemn secret of this day's confession. Go then, and may the God who watches over all his creatures with a father's pitying eye, protect and sustain you !"

Once more Bertha uttered an earnest assurance of her deep gratitude, and departed from the church, her carriage and her wondering servants having long been waiting for her at its door.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEEPLY now had Bertha cause to deplore the thoughtless expenses in which she had indulged herself since her arrival at Rome. Bronze copies after the antique, if they are in a good style of workmanship, cost a good deal, and so, too, do mosaics, and well-cut intaglio imitations of first-rate gems; and in all these little gauds and toys she had indulged herself so freely, that the second remittance of her increased allowance was so nearly gone as to leave her with very little more than sufficient to pay for her carriage and servants for the current months. Had she possessed the means of paying for her journey, she would have set off the very hour her accomplished Luigi could have obtained her a passport and so forth *en règle*; but this was now impossible, and notwithstanding the inexpressible consolation afforded by the information she had received, she felt a miserable restlessness from her enforced continuance at Rome, which made her look forward either to the arrival of her cousin or of her next remittance with feverish impatience. She felt, indeed, that she should find some difficulty in explaining to Vincent the cause of her sudden determination to return; the impossibility of her doing so having been again and again the theme of lamentation in her conversations with him. But this was nothing compared to the agony of being thus kept from atoning for her involuntary fault, and of bestowing on her suffering and contrite father the best, perhaps the only consolation, the world had left for him. Her increased allowance had hitherto been carelessly received, and without inspiring the slightest sensation of gratitude. But now she seemed to feel that her unhappy parent did all he dared to do towards contributing to her comfort, and proving that his thoughts were with her. But Vincent came not, and two months had still to wear themselves away before she could act upon the resolution she had taken.

Perhaps it may be said of adventures as of sorrows, when they come,

“They come not single spies, but in battalions.”

Plots were certainly thickening round Bertha, nor were the Roberts family beyond the reach of rather startling vicissitudes.

“I give you notice, ma’am,” said Mr. Edward Roberts, rushing into his mother’s bed-room in rather an unceremonious style, “I give you fair notice that preaching won’t do for me now; so don’t try, if you please. I don’t suppose you have the power, have you, of accommodating me with three hundred pounds?”

“Three hundred fiddle-sticks, Edward! What joke are you upon now?” returned his mother, who was in excellent spirits, having just received an invitation to an ambassadorial ball.

"Joke, mother? You will find soon enough that it is no joke, I promise you. I have lost bets to the amount of three hundred pounds; and it is no good for me to give my I O U for them, unless I am sure of being able to take them up. Can you, or can you not, get this money for me?"

"Most certainly, Edward, I cannot," replied his mother, in considerable agitation. "Your poor father is, no doubt, getting more twaddling and imbecile every day. But this would rouse him to fresh life and opposition, you may depend upon it. We should not only fail of getting such a sum as that, but, take my word for it, we should have him getting troublesome again about every shilling we wanted."

"Then my last race is run, mother!" replied her son. "I must shoot myself."

"Nonsense, Edward! How can you be so wicked as to try to frighten me by talking such rhodomontade? I don't see anything at all just at present that can justify us in being out of spirits. Only see the fuss that Theresa Yabiolporakiosy makes with Agatha! I am quite sure she might go and live with her any day. And as to Maria, who really grows handsomer every day, I will ask you to tell me who there is in Rome that Prince Frederigo Paulovino appears to care about, excepting herself? It is impossible not to see it. The thing is as clear as light. Can you deny this, Edward?"

"Oh dear no, ma'am. The thing is very evident indeed—only you know the prince is unfortunately married, and therefore there is no hope from that quarter that our beauty should be transmogrified into La Princesse Maria. This is unlucky, you see."

"Not at all unlucky. You really speak as if you had left England and your leading-strings yesterday. I never said that I expected to see her made Princess Maria Paulovino. I am not so wicked as to wish for any one's death. But it is her success I am talking of—the high fashion that you must perceive she is in, if you are not turned blind with your odious betting. It is *that* I am talking of, Edward, and it is that which I am alluding to when I say that her prospects are good."

"Well, mother, so much the better for her," returned the young man. "But if you know what's what, enough to understand the sort of condition I am in at present, you would not think my prospects very good, I promise you. So I will beg you to stop short, ma'am, if you please, in your crowings about your daughters, and recollect that you are now, perhaps, looking at your son for the last time."

"How very silly it is of you, Edward, to try to bully me in this way by threatening to blow your brains out! How can you think I am such a goose as to believe you?" returned his mother, with a tone and manner which proved she had profited a good deal by past experience. "Perhaps it will do you good to hear that we are

invited to the ball that people were talking of last night at the — ambassador's?"

But Mrs. Roberts was considerably alarmed when she saw the lips of her handsome son become suddenly white, while he stamped his foot vehemently on the floor, as he replied, "By Heaven, madam, this is no laughing matter. The man I owe the money to is Prince Frederigo; and if you have a grain of common sense left you may guess, without my telling you, the sort of reception I should be likely to meet at the ball you talk of, if I appear there with my bets unpaid. It is very likely you may enjoy the satisfaction of seeing Maria in the very tenderest of all possible flirtations on one side, and Miss Agatha on the arm of her Princess on the other, showing her admirable tact by not hearing a word of what is murmured from a moustache into her highness's off ear. All this is very likely, and may, as you say, promise well. But you will see ME looked at from head to foot by the high mightiness who is making love to my sister, in a style that will be perfectly well understood by the knowing ones to mean, 'I intend to kick you, young sir, at the first convenient opportunity.' And kick me he will, ma'am, you may depend upon it, notwithstanding his tender passion for my sister."

It is always, or almost always, easy to see when a man is in earnest, and Mrs. Roberts plainly saw that her son was in earnest now. She did not indeed believe that he had any very serious thoughts of shooting himself, but she saw plainly enough that the high place in society, of which she had just been boasting, must inevitably be endangered if her son exposed himself to such a meeting as he described. Instead of replying to him in the same light tone she had used before, she remained for some moments silent; and when at length she spoke, it was in a manner that showed she was quite as much in earnest as himself.

"I doubt, Edward," said she, "if you are at all aware of the great difficulties—nay, it may be the utter ruin—in which your unthinking folly is likely to plunge us. If you think, my son, that you and your sisters can be taken from a small faded house in Baker-street, where we thought ourselves lucky if we could catch the wife of a knight, that we might delight our ears by the sound of 'her ladyship,'—if you think that you can all be taken from such a home as that, and thrown into the greatest intimacy with princes and dukes, princesses and duchesses, without some difficulty, you are mistaken. I have done a good deal for you all (and this I believe nobody will deny) in contriving to do this with no greater expense in the way of lodgings than what we pay here. Nobody can say that I have ever indulged my pride by inviting a single creature to visit us here, except just leaving cards in a morning. Have I spent a single farthing upon giving any one even a cup of tea? Have I not managed to get you all received night after night into all the finest drawing-rooms in Rome, with-

out ever dreaming of giving any parties in return? Who is there, then, that can reproach me with extravagance or bad management? But yet, Edward, all this cannot be done for nothing—you know it can't—you know what your own dress has cost, and you may guess, then, mine and your sisters' cannot have been a great deal less. This and the carriage, and the being obliged to have something like a regular dinner every day on account of Miss Harrington, has obliged me to push your father to the very utmost for money. And to tell you the truth at once, Edward, I don't think he has lost his faculties enough—though he does, poor man, drink brandy-and-water every night—to make him draw a check for three hundred pounds more of capital, without more fuss and difficulty than I know how to stand; therefore, if you please, you must ask him for the money yourself."

Her son, who, during the whole of this long speech, had sat with his arms on the table, and his face resting upon them, now looked up with a desperate sort of wildness in his eyes, that certainly did frighten his mother considerably; and when he spoke, there was nothing either in his words or manner to comfort her.

"This is your answer, ma'am, is it?" he said, with a sort of unnatural quietness. "Then I will wish you good morning," and he rose from his seat as he spoke.

"Stay, Edward," said she, laying her hand on his arm, and almost forcing him to sit down again. "Stay, my dear boy. I have told you nothing but the truth as to the hopelessness of getting such a sum of money from your father just at present, without such a scene as it would be much better to avoid. But that is no reason why you should leave me in this way, without a word of consultation upon any other way of getting out of the scrape."

"Consultation! Words won't pay debts, ma'am. I hate talking when no good can come of it," said the young man, gloomily.

"But good may come of it, Edward," she replied. "Do tell me," she added, lowering her voice to a whisper, "do tell me, when do you propose to put your plan in execution about marrying Bertha? You have not given it up, have you?"

"What has that to do with what we are now talking about? If I marry the girl to-day, can she give me three hundred pounds to-morrow?" replied the young man, impatiently.

"I don't know about to-morrow—but it would not be very long first, depend upon it. Besides, Edward, if you would but leave off frowning so savagely, and let us set our wits to work together as to how things might be managed, I think it is very likely we might hit upon something or other that might help to get you through your difficulties—great as, I must say, you have managed to make them."

"I will not be reproached, ma'am," said her son, with a good

deal of vehemence. "*That* I will not bear, and it is as well to tell you so at once."

"I don't mean to reproach you, my dear boy. I vow and declare that I had no such idea in my thoughts. Quite the contrary, Edward. What I was thinking of, my dear, was this. I know all about debts of honour, remember, and that they must always be paid almost directly, and all that; but yet I think that with your cleverness, and my cleverness to help you, something might be done to gain a little time—only a very little, remember."

"Impossible, ma'am! Don't delude yourself with any such nonsense."

"Well! but only just hear me, Edward. Of course, my dear, you must not attempt to pass it over, even for a day, as if you had forgotten it. I know all that just as well as you do," said Mrs. Roberts, nodding her head with a satisfactory degree of intelligence. "On the contrary, Edward, I would not have you lose an hour, or hardly a moment, excepting to hear what I have got to say, before you go to Prince Frederigo. If you don't find him at home, leave your card with a message, or a little scrap of paper that you can have ready written, which would show at once that you have no intention of behaving unhandsomely; and the message should be to say, that you greatly wish to have the honour, or pleasure, whichever you like best, of seeing him for a few minutes. And then you may be very sure that he would send for you; and when you do get at him, you must not look as frightened and as miserable as you do now, but you must have rather a gay, but at the same time a confidential air, and tell him that though you should never, under other circumstances, have thought of troubling him with your private affairs, yet that you trust he will favour you with his attention for five minutes. And then, Edward, you ought to look very happy and very triumphant, and go on to tell him that though the trifle you have lost to him—be sure you say trifle, Edward—that though the trifle you have lost to him would have been of no great consequence at any other time, it was very inconvenient at this moment, because—and here you should laugh, and hesitate a little—because you were this very night to elope with the loveliest girl in the world, whose father, a man of very high rank and enormous fortune, opposed your happiness because you could not, during the lifetime of your father, come forward with an income equal to her own. You should then add, in a gay, laughing, coaxing sort of way, that you hope and trust he will give us a day or two for the redeeming your I O U, as you cannot pay it immediately without dipping so deeply into your travelling purse as to render the elopement impossible. Because, of course, you cannot apply to your father and mother who would not consent to such a thing for the world."

Something like a smile took place of the portentous frown with which the young man had hitherto listened to his mother.

"Upon my word, ma'am, you seem to have considerable talent in the romancing line," said he; "and I won't deny that such a statement might be made in the tone you describe, without giving the prince any reason to suspect that I was a swindler. But be so good as to tell me what is to come next? Because this confidential statement, you know, will not do above once. Do you think it will?"

"No, certainly, Edward," replied his mother, laughing; "I do not think it, nor do I intend that you should try. Only get him to give you a little law, and the rest will be all plain sailing."

"Plain sailing? What can you mean, ma'am? Are we all to sail away from Rome? Is that your project?"

"No, not at all, Edward—only you and your wife."

"My wife? Do you mean that I am to get married to that odious Bertha within the next twenty-four hours?" exclaimed the youth, the awful frown again taking possession of his features.

"There is no use in trying to look fierce about it, Edward. I am sure I have let you go on your own way very patiently, and had really made up my mind to wait your own time about it. And now it is you, and not I, who have made it necessary for you to marry her immediately. If the prince gives you leave and licence to set off on this expedition—and even if there were no Maria in the case, I don't think he could refuse—but if he does give leave, he must know as well as you do that the thing cannot be done in a moment. You must get out of the way of pursuit—nay, I am by no means sure that you must not go all the way to Scotland before you can get married. But when you are once the girl's husband, you may depend upon it Sir Christopher won't let your name be posted for the sake of saving three hundred pounds. What do you think of it, Edward? Can you suggest anything better?"

"No, ma'am, I don't think I can—that is, if you really think it impossible to make my father give me the money. I should like that a great deal better," he replied.

"I tell you it is impossible," said his mother, frowning in her turn; "but you may try, if you please; you may go to him this moment, if you like it, and try what you can do."

"Not I, ma'am, I promise you; I have no taste for that sort of thing. But by the way, mother, will you be so obliging as to tell me how I am to set off with Miss Bertha on a journey to Scotland without any money? Do you keep a little hoard, ma'am, always ready for the purpose?" demanded the youth.

"No, indeed, Edward," she replied. "Heaven knows I have not twenty pounds at my command, if my life depended upon it, and we have already got milliners' bills here that were perfectly unavoidable, but not the more easily paid, for all that. However if

I am not greatly mistaken, your good father has still got his wits enough about him to give us a cheque for this, if he never gives us another. I have never plagued you about it, but he has asked me over and over again when I thought it was likely to happen."

Edward drew forth a sigh of great length and depth.

"Well then, I suppose," said he, "that I must really submit, and swallow the gilded pill. Oh, heavens! how I shall hate her! And the poor dear Countess Tornorino!—it will give her a dreadful pang, I know. You must promise that you and the girls will be most particularly civil and attentive to her; and tell Agatha not to be rude to the tiresome husband, though I know she hates his love and his waltzing, as much as I adore both in his wife. But I shall like to find you all great friends when I come back."

"Very well, my dear, we will promise to do everything you wish in that way," replied his mother, delighted to have brought him at last to do what she had often feared would be too long delayed. "I will go to your father directly, and get what I think will be sufficient for the purpose; he will be ready enough to give it, I'll answer for him. Poor man! he often says it is the best stake we have yet to play for, but I won't allow that yet—I wish Lynberry would come on to Rome at once—he never saw Maria looking as she does now. But we must not stay gossiping, Edward; you must go your way, and I must go mine, and may success attend us both!"

CHAPTER XLVIII.

FOR the two first days after Bertha's agitating encounter with Mademoiselle Labarre, she spent her time, excepting when meeting the Roberts family at table, wholly in her own apartment, half occupied in thanking Heaven for the providential meeting which had relieved her mind from such a weight of suffering, and the other half in almost counting the minutes that must intervene ere she should be able to set off on the journey that would bring her to her suffering father, and enable her to atone for the dreadful suspicions with which she had loaded him, by her dutiful efforts to cheer his solitude and soothe his remorse. During the first vehemence of her strongly excited feelings, these thoughts, together with a restless disarrangement and rearrangement of all her effects, as a preparation for packing, sufficed to occupy her time. But at length she remembered that weeks had still to come and go before her eagerness to set out could be turned to any useful account; and schooling herself into a more reasonable state of mind, she determined, as her carriage was hired by the month, and must be paid for, to turn it to profit in the most rational way she could, by once more revisiting the objects that she most wished to impress accurately on her memory. She accordingly set out one morning as soon as breakfast was over, to take a last walk over every acces-

sible part of St. Peter's; and having spent above two hours in giving a last lingering glance to the various points that most deeply interested and delighted her, and then recollecting that though there were so many things to be looked at again for the last time, she might still be able, the very day before her departure, to return to this greatest of all Rome's wonders to look her last farewell, she squeezed herself under the unliftable leather curtain that hung over the door, and, walking with lingering steps across the matchless portico, reached her carriage by the descent leading from the Vatican.

While she was thus leaving the most glorious of Christian temples at one point, two young men were, arm in arm, approaching it at another. One of them appeared to have no eyes for anything but the solemn splendour of the fabric he was approaching; but the other, to whom it was more familiar, while he submitted to the creeping pace at which his friend mounted the flight of steps that led to the gorgeous entrance, permitted his eyes to wander, and caught sight of the light figure of Bertha as she descended the graduated slope to her carriage.

"Let St. Peter alone for one moment, Vincent," said he, "while you give one look to the most delicate-looking creature that ever condescended to bestow herself, *par amour*, upon mortal man."

"How can you suffer such a one, let her wear what guise she will, to draw your eyes one single moment from the awful splendour of this portico, Lawry?" replied the person he addressed. "Let us go on. And yet, I declare to you that I almost tremble at the thought of entering."

"Nonsense! you shall not enter till you have looked at that girl," replied Lawry, forcibly directing the steps of his vexed companion the way he wished. "I really want you to look at her, Vincent," he added more seriously, "for, upon the word of an English gentleman, I have had some pretty vehement struggles with myself, notwithstanding what I have said of her, to prevent my seeking an introduction in the hope of making her my wife."

This startling avowal produced the effect intended, and induced Mr. Vincent to bend his steps in the direction indicated. The first glance he caught was imperfect, for a column intervened; yet it was sufficient to convert the next step into a bound, and at the third he began fairly to run as fast as his legs could carry him towards the retreating Bertha.

But all the speed he could use only sufficed to make him perfectly sure that it was his young cousin that he saw before him; and then the active Luigi, having closed the carriage-door and sprung to his seat behind it, drove off, leaving him gazing after it with a look so bewildered as to cause his friend a hearty laugh as he approached him. A moment's reflection, however, restored Vincent to his usual composure. He resumed the arm of his friend, and, turning back towards the portico, said very quietly, "You

have made a blunder, Lawry : that young lady is an acquaintance—nay more, a relation of mine, and as little likely, I assure you, as possible,” he added, with a smile, “to deserve the mysterious imputation you have cast upon her.”

“I beg your pardon, my dear Vincent,” said Lawry, suddenly standing still. “But I need not do so,” he added, shaking off the air of embarrassment with which he had begun his speech. “It is idle to pretend to apologize for an offence it is impossible I can have committed. Your cursory view of that fair creature deceived you, Vincent. She is no relation of yours, take my word for it.”

“But I will not take your word for it, my dear Lawry,” replied Vincent, laughing. “I assure you that I know my young cousin by sight; and the only reason that I am now with you instead of being with her is, that I know not her address, as I have always written to her *posta restanta*, which I have done again this morning, requesting to know where she is, and I have no doubts or fears but that I shall get an answer from her to-morrow morning. I am not much in the habit of betting, Lawry, but I will lay ten scudi to one, that if you see that young lady to-morrow you will see me by her side.”

“But, my dear friend,” returned Lawry, looking a good deal embarrassed, “it is not only the lady, but her carriage and servants, which I am certain I cannot mistake. I am half ashamed to confess it, but the fact is that I have followed that young creature about from church to church, from ruin to ruin, from gallery to gallery, for weeks past. I know her bonnet, her mantle, and her grey and black parasol, as well as she does herself; and, moreover, I confess that I have condescended to gossip with her *valet de place* till I know every circumstance concerning her.”

“Do you know the name of the family with whom she is living?” demanded Vincent.

“I doubt if I do,” replied his friend; “the Italian pronounced the name in a manner which, though he repeated it a dozen times, was perfectly unintelligible to me. He says they are all English, but the name sounded Italian. Huberti, I think he said, or something like it.”

“And her own name?” said Vincent, colouring slightly.

“That he could not tell me, frankly confessing that it was too difficult for him to remember.”

“Did you ever speak to the lady you mention?” demanded Vincent.

“Never!” was the almost eager reply. “There was something in her appearance which impressed me with a feeling that would have rendered it impossible to address her as one might do any other woman in the same circumstance. I knew I should make a fool of myself if I ventured to get acquainted with her, and therefore I have never obtruded myself sufficiently to attract her notice for a single moment.”

"Now then, Lawry, I think the mystery becomes less difficult of solution. Had you conversed with her, I might still have been puzzled. But I think you will allow that it is more likely you may have blundered about the identity of a lady to whom you have never spoken, than that the daughter of Sir Christopher Harrington, and my greatly esteemed young cousin, should be living in the manner you mentioned."

"Most assuredly I should so decide, were that the only alternative before us, Vincent. But it is not. My theory is, that you have mistaken my less fortunate lady for your fair cousin."

"Do not let us talk any more about it, Lawry. I do assure you it is quite too absurd to suppose there can be any possible mistake on my part. But let us go somewhere else. I will not enter St. Peter's to-day. Indeed it was a treason against my cousin, Bertha to think of seeing it without her."

"Bertha!" repeated Lawry, suddenly standing still; and when Vincent turned to look at him, his whole face was scarlet.

"For Heaven's sake, Lawry, what have you got into your head now? you look as if you were going to fall into a fit of apoplexy. What is it has made you change colour so vehemently?"

For a moment the young man stood irresolute, and then replied, "I was startled by the name you mentioned."

"What name, sir?" said Vincent, abruptly.

"The name of Bertha," replied Lawry, quietly.

"Be very careful, Mr. Lawry, neither in jest nor earnest to mention that name lightly! I certainly do not mean to threaten you: you know me too well to suppose it. I would only warn you against doing what your own excellent nature would lead you to repent of bitterly," said Vincent, solemnly.

"For mercy's sake, Vincent, let us both be reasonable, if we can," returned the other. "There is probably some blunder in this business, that, if we are wise enough not to quarrel first, may make us both laugh when it is understood. The name of the young person I have been speaking of is Bertha—a coincidence too remarkable to be easily dismissed as accidental. Her servant, in speaking of her constantly called her '*La Signorina Bertha*.' Instead, therefore, of tormenting ourselves and each other by disputing about what is possible or impossible, let us go to this man Luigi Mondorlo, and learn from him what right he has to make such assertions respecting this lady as he has made to me."

"Do you know where to find him?" inquired Mr. Vincent.

"Yes," replied Lawry; "I commenced my acquaintance with him by inquiring where he might be found, in case I or my friends should have need of a *valet-de-place*."

"Come along, then, in the name of common sense," said Vincent; and the two young men, once more arm in arm, set off at a rapid pace for the Piazza di Spagna. There they readily obtained the address of Luigi Mondorlo, and immediately repaired to his

lodgings. Sooner than he could have been reasonably expected, the man appeared, and civilly saluted Lawry.

"I want to speak with you for five minutes, Luigi," said that gentleman, assuming the tone of an old acquaintance. "Have you any room you can take us into for a few minutes? I want to have a little conversation with you."

"You shall be welcome, sir, to the best I have," replied the man courteously, "and the other signore too, if he likes to enter. Perhaps you have found a job for me, signore?"

They entered the humble apartment of the *valet-de-place* accordingly, and Lawry immediately addressed their host as follows:—

"We have just been at St. Peter's, Luigi, and there we saw you and your carriage, and the lady upon whom you are attending. This gentleman thinks that he has known her formerly, and wishes to learn from you all you know respecting her present situation."

"Formerly, sir?" said the man; "the poor lady is too young, I should think, for any one to have known much of her long."

"Young people may be known as well as old ones, my friend," said Vincent. "But I wish you would tell me how much you know about her, for I am acquainted with her family, and all you can tell will be interesting to them. Do you know her name, my good fellow?"

"I am afraid I don't know how to pronounce it properly," he replied, "but I certainly ought to know it."

"Is she called Bertha Harrington?" said Vincent.

"Yes, sir, that is her name," answered the man, without the least hesitation.

"And what do you know about her?" continued Vincent, looking more puzzled than alarmed.

"No harm whatever, sir," replied the man; "at least, nothing that any reasonable gentleman ought to call harm. Because such things are all their own doing. All I know is that she has hired me, as many other pretty ladies living in the same manner have done before, and that I wait upon her and she pays me. I may perhaps have said to this gentleman that she goes about in a way that don't look as if she was over and above devoted to the gentleman, whoever he is, that she lives with. But that was only guess work on my part. What I did not tell him, though, because I have only just found it out, is, that I suspect, poor young lady! that she is not contented with her condition; and that she is going to make a nun of herself in the same convent where my sister is. My sister says she is pretty well sure of it, because the poor young lady was shut up with Father Maurizio for above two hours on Wednesday; and to the truth of that I can testify, seeing that I waited for her at the door of the Santa Consolazione on that day for a great deal longer than that."

"And all that you know about this young lady, then, is, that she

pays for her own carriage, goes about seeing all the curious things in Rome without any companion, and that she had a long conversation with a Roman Catholic priest last Wednesday?" said Vincent, with the air of a man completely relieved from all his doubts and fears.

"Yes, signore," replied Luigi, "that is all I know, excepting that the Italians generally see through these kind of things pretty quickly, and that we may often be said to know a good deal more than we see."

"And this is the case, I presume, in love and religion equally," said Vincent; "otherwise you could scarcely be so sure of her intending to become a nun as you appear to be."

"Why, as to that, sir, I have not only the opinion of my holy sister to enlighten me, but also the fact that she has told me this very day that she shall have no occasion for my services, nor for the carriage either, beyond the current month for which we were last hired."

"Well, then, Mr. Luigi Mondorlo, I will not trouble you with any more inquiries, except as to the present address of the young lady in question. She is my near relation, and I wish to see her immediately."

"I hope, signore, I have not brought the young lady into trouble by anything I have said?" replied the man, looking greatly disconcerted. "When young gentlemen make inquiries about young ladies, like this gentleman did, we never make any objection to answering them, because it is most likely that it may be advantageous to both parties. But relations, you see, signore, are quite different; and I don't feel as if it were quite honourable to tell you where she lives."

Vincent smiled, and, drawing out his purse, drew from it a piece of gold, which he presented to the conscientious valet, saying:—"In this case, my good friend, I do assure you that you have nothing to fear. You will do no harm, believe me, in giving me the lady's address, for I am quite sure of getting it from another quarter to-morrow. But as I am impatient to see her, I would prefer taking it now. This napoleon will pay you for the trouble of writing it."

"It is impossible to doubt the word of so perfect a gentleman," replied Luigi, with a profound bow, and dipping the stump of an antiquated pen into a bottle of ink, he scrawled in tolerably legible characters the address of the Robertses.

The two gentlemen then took their leave, but Vincent did not now pass his arm under that of Lawry. But perhaps this was only because he now meant to pursue his way alone. After walking in silence the few steps which brought them to the corner of the street, Vincent stood still, and turning to his companion with a smile, rather more quizzing than cordial, he said, "And now, Mr. Lawry, I must wish you good morning, as I certainly do not mean

to lose a moment in waiting on Miss Harrington, in order to inform her of the result of her antiquarian researches. But before we part, do me the favour to tell me if you think the testimony of the Signore Luigi Mondorlo of better authority than mine, respecting the real position of the lady who has been the principal theme of our conversation?"

"Be generous, Vincent!" cried Lawry, with considerable emotion. "You must know well enough, without my telling you, the contempt and indignation in which I hold myself for having listened to the gabble of such a fellow! But it is not he whom I should despise; it is myself. An Italian lackey may be well excused for judging after his kind, but that an Englishman should look at such an Englishwoman, and be so beguiled, is monstrous—I have no one to blame but myself."

"I think so too," said Vincent, quietly.

"Then I suppose you mean to cut me as a punishment for my folly?" said Lawry, colouring to the ears.

"By no means," replied Vincent, his good-humour quite restored by the genuine suffering which he read in the countenance of his unlucky friend. "On the contrary, I shall have much pleasure in presenting you to my young relation, and will promise not to say a word about the flattering sort of attention you have been paying her—only asking you in return to be more cautious in your judgments for the future. I suspect that both Englishmen and Englishwomen too are likely enough to blunder in their estimates of each other when meeting in a foreign land. They are seen in a new, and what is to them a false light, and I conceive that the outline is often a good deal distorted by it. Good bye!" and Vincent held out his hand with a smile.

Lawry took it, and pressed it gratefully, but looked very much as if he knew not whether to be most gratified or most frightened at the thoughts of the promised introduction.

CHAPTER XLIX.

WHILE the name and fame of poor Bertha were undergoing this to her most unsuspected discussion, she was herself exposed to an adventure equally unexpected. Mrs. Roberts was perfectly well aware that Miss Harrington's usual manner of spending her mornings brought her home about an hour before their usual time for dining; and therefore, although a short interview with her son, subsequent to that which has been recently described, left her very desirous of seeing her, she sat down very patiently to wait for her return at the expected time. It was therefore with great satisfaction that she saw her drive up to the door a full hour earlier than usual, upon her return from her farewell visit to St. Peter's. Mrs. Roberts's carriage, with her two daughters and the man-servant in attendance on them, was not expected to return till rather later

than usual, so that the interview with Miss Harrington projected by her hostess was not likely to be interrupted. As Bertha mounted the stairs, she perceived Mrs. Roberts on the landing-place, waiting to receive her.—“My dear Miss Harrington!” she exclaimed, “I am so glad you are come back! Step into the drawing-room for one moment, for I want to speak to you.”

Had Bertha wished to refuse, she would have found it very difficult to do so; but she really did not. The certainty of her approaching departure had softened her heart so greatly towards Mrs. Roberts and her whole family, that she would not have been guilty of the least rudeness, to avoid speaking to either of them; she therefore entered the drawing-room with rather a smiling bow of acquiescence, though she held in her hand an unopened letter, which the maid-servant had given her before she came upstairs. Nevertheless, she knew at the very first glance that it was from Vincent; and the facility with which she thus submitted to delay the reading it, was a strong proof that the heavy load which had been taken from her heart by the communication of Father Maurice had produced an excellent effect.

“Now then, my dear,” said Mrs. Roberts, shutting the door, “I have a very great favour to beg of you, and I feel almost sure you will grant it, because I have never troubled you with asking any such favour before. I have just got a ticket sent me to admit us to see that greatest of all curiosities that has been dug up where they are building that grand new church to St. Paul, outside the town, you know, my dear. This is the last day it is to be exhibited, and the girls won’t come home with the carriage till it is too late. Will you have the great, *great* kindness to take me in your carriage? There is plenty of time before dinner.”

“You are perfectly welcome to the carriage, Mrs. Roberts,” replied Bertha. “I am only afraid that it is driven away.”

“No, it isn’t, my dear, for I told the maid to stop it,” replied Mrs. Roberts, exultingly.

“But at any rate, ma’am,” returned Bertha with a good-humoured smile, “you must condescend to go without a footman, for I sent off Luigi with a message to a shop, where they have something to do for me that I want to have finished directly.”

“Oh, my dear, that won’t make the least bit of difference in the world,” replied Mrs. Roberts. “It is not as if we were setting off to pay visits, you know—that would be quite a different thing. But I don’t know yet, my dear Miss Harrington, if you are quite aware of all the favour I meant to ask of you. The ticket is for the whole family, and it will be too dismal for me to go alone. I should take it as so very particularly kind if you would go with me?”

This was a sort of request which Bertha would most probably have refused point-blank, or at any rate would have granted very ungraciously, had it been made to her a week before; but the cer-

tainty that she was soon going to leave for ever the home which, though distasteful, had afforded her at least a tolerably peaceful shelter, softened her heart, and she replied, without manifesting any symptoms of repugnance, that she would certainly accompany her, if she would have the kindness to excuse her reading a letter she had just received, as she went along. Mrs. Roberts of course told her that she should not mind it at all, and they set off together. The letter was from Mr. Vincent ; and deeply, oh ! very deeply did Bertha rejoice, as she discovered that it was dated from an hotel in Rome. The only circumstance which she thought could at that moment have increased her satisfaction at the healing news she had heard, had now occurred. She should see her cousin William before she left Rome, and she should be able to implore him, before they parted, to promise her that he would submit to be reconciled to her father, and to pay them a speedy visit at Castle Harrington. She scarcely remembered at that happy moment that she would have some difficulty in explaining to her cousin the reasons which had led her to take so sudden and so important a resolution ; but she remembered that she had never fully explained to him her own ideas as to the reasons which she had supposed her father to have had for sending her from him, and with equal caution had she avoided expressing to him the terrible feelings which, when they were last together, had made her return impossible. She flattered herself, therefore, that her promise to Father Maurice would in no way embarrass her, but that she should be able to explain her departure by simply stating the fact that she was tired of staying with the Robertses, and preferred taking the chance of finding a more comfortable home with her father.

In such meditations, and in again and again reading her precious letter, the time passed quickly enough, without her having recourse to the conversation of Mrs. Roberts. That lady, indeed, seemed much less disposed to converse than usual, sitting very profoundly still, neither drawing up the windows nor letting them down, as was usual with her, and looking altogether so demure and sedate, that she might have been taken for a well-drilled figure, performing a part in a state pageant. At length, however, Bertha, who had more than once before visited the glowing splendours of St. Paul at Rome, began to think that they were a great while getting there.

"What direction did you give to the coachman, Mrs. Roberts ?" said she. "I don't think the man is coming the right way ; and he ought to know the road, too, for he has been here with me two or three times."

"I gave him the proper orders, my dear, I assure you," replied Mrs. Roberts, composedly.

Bertha once more opened her letter, and read it through, and having closed and deposited it in her pocket, she again looked out of the window, and apparently saw some object that startled

her, for she suddenly exclaimed, "Now, then, I am very sure that we are going wrong, for I see the trees in the burying-ground, near which we ought to have passed, precisely at right angles, or indeed rather behind us. What does all this mean, Mrs. Roberts? I really cannot spend all the afternoon driving about in this way—I want to get home, ma'am—I have a letter to write."

And Bertha, as she spoke, got up, and put her head out of the window, evidently with an intention of stopping the coachman.

"My dear Miss Harrington! what are you afraid of?" inquired Mrs. Roberts, playfully throwing an arm round her. "Do you think the horses are running away?" But playfully as this was done and said, the caressing action of Mrs. Roberts was sufficiently vigorous to retain the young lady in her seat as long as it lasted. This period, however, did not exceed about three minutes, during which Bertha sat with immovable stateliness, only repeating, at short intervals, "I am afraid of nothing, Mrs. Roberts." But just as her indignant sort of submission to this strange embrace was about to give way before her irresistible desire to get rid of it, the carriage stopped, the arms of Mrs. Roberts were withdrawn, the carriage-door was thrown open, a large cloak (in the regular melodramatic style) was thrown over her, and before a single thought could arise as to what it all meant, Bertha felt herself seized upon and deposited in another carriage which darted off as rapidly as four Roman post-horses could draw it. Bertha's first efforts were directed to the doing battle with the folds of the cloak that had been wrapped round her, and she did it so effectually that she had no need to exhaust her faculties in wondering as to who could be the audacious perpetrator of the exploit: for there sat Mr. Edward Roberts beside her, his arms folded in an attitude of bold defiance across his breast, his legs thrust out to the furthest extent that the vehicle permitted, and such an awful and determined frown upon his brow as might have daunted the heart of most young ladies situated as Miss Harrington was at that moment. But, by some strange peculiarity in that young lady's character, she positively felt almost as much inclination to laugh as to scream; however, she did neither, but looking very deliberately at the young gentleman for a moment, she said quite in her usual tone of voice, "Will you be so obliging as to inform me, Mr. Edward Roberts, what may be your purpose in arranging this unexpected interview?"

The young man, who had been preparing himself for a scene of great violence, and who, having no very particular tender feelings towards his companion, was determined to carry his point by every sort of violence, short of actually stifling her in the huge cloak with which he had provided himself, was at first a good deal puzzled as to what tone he ought to take with so self-possessed a heroine. At one moment it struck him that the best way would be to begin making violent love to her, but a twofold feeling

stopped him—namely, the extreme disinclination which he felt for the occupation himself, with Bertha for his partner, and a pretty strong conviction that she would not bear it for an instant, and therefore that it might make her troublesome. So he pretended not to perceive that she was looking at him, and only said in reply to her question, “The moment of explanation, Miss Harrington, is not yet come.”

As if perfectly satisfied by this answer, Bertha settled herself very quietly in the corner of the carriage, and, in order to lessen the awkwardness of the silent tête-à-tête, she again drew the precious letter from her pocket. But, precious as it was, it certainly did not at that moment occupy her wholly; for, notwithstanding her comfortable contempt for Mr. Edward Roberts and his ridiculous attempt, she did nevertheless condescend to bestow a little of the leisure she seemed likely to enjoy in meditating on the probable motives of the young gentleman, and the easiest and readiest means of getting rid of him.

As to his motives, a much duller girl than Bertha might easily have guessed them. Little as she had been accustomed to mix herself with the family, she had seen enough of their proceedings to convince her that they were often distressed for money; and strange as her position in their family had been, and totally inconsistent with her station as was her being with them at all, she was by no means ignorant of the high consideration in which they held that station, or of the exaggerated estimate which they had formed of her probable wealth, from the expenditure which her father’s liberal allowance permitted. These two facts, placed side by side, naturally enough led to the obvious conclusion that Mrs. Roberts and her son, to say nothing of the rest of the family, thought that the best thing they could do would be to get possession of her fortune by getting legal possession of herself. As she came to this conclusion, which she arrived at pretty rapidly, she felt disposed to give Edward some credit for the discernment which had prevented his ever attempting to make love to her.

“He has taken by far the better way,” thought she; “but it will not do, for all that.”

Edward, meanwhile, was a good deal more puzzled by the young lady’s demeanour than she was by his.

“Is she too much struck by the firmness of my manner to utter another word?” he asked himself, without, however, being at all able to return himself an answer; and then the new idea suggested itself, that after all, perhaps, her pride and reserve had only been assumed, to prevent his seeing what she really thought of him. If so, the business would be more easy than he had expected to find it. “But for that,” thought he, “I care not a single rush.”

And thus, in tacit mutual defiance, they rolled along, without exchanging another word.

CHAPTER I.

MISS HARRINGTON knew very little of the environs of Rome. She had on one occasion driven far enough to indulge herself with a ramble among the arches of the magnificent aqueduct, but this had been her only distant excursion, and this she knew had not led her in a direction which it was at all likely Mr. Edward Roberts would follow on the present occasion; she therefore felt no particular eagerness to look out of the window in order to ascertain in what direction she was going, but listened patiently to the voice of common sense, which told her that, go which way they would, they must seek the habitation of man, both for the purpose of changing horses and obtaining food. Whenever this should happen, Bertha knew that she had one great advantage over her companion—namely, that she spoke Italian with great facility, while she greatly doubted if he could make himself understood. Another advantage, of which she was likewise fully sensible, was, that the enterprise she had before her was of much easier accomplishment than his, inasmuch as there was less difficulty in getting back to Rome when only one stage from it, than in reaching Gretna Green from the same spot. Notwithstanding her courageous patience, however, the stage did appear a very long one; and at one moment the lady so nearly raised herself sufficiently to look out of the window, that the gentleman made a corresponding movement on his side to get the cloak ready to throw over her if she did.

"Time and the hour," however, brought them to the place where the horses were to be changed, and Bertha very stoutly made up her mind that she would not go any further. When the carriage stopped, therefore, she sat very particularly still, and once again began reading her letter. Edward looked at her, and at the window next her, and, perceiving that both were just as they ought to be, set himself to perform the unavoidable business of paying the postilions. Bertha was right in supposing that Mr. Edward Roberts was no great proficient in speaking the Italian language, but she was wrong if she thought that he could not do it at all. Had this been the case, he probably would not have ventured upon attempting to carry through his enterprise without the assistance of a servant. But having only a scanty stock of money, and a very great opinion of his own cleverness, he learned by heart the rate of posting, the usual amount for the *buono mano*, and the value of the current coin, and thought that with the aid of his own peculiar sharp-wittedness, it would do very well. When the boys drew near the window, Edward again sent a furtive glance into the corner, but Bertha was sitting in the most languid and quiescent attitude possible. Edward then rehearsed the amount of their claim as distinctly as he could, and one of the lads uttered a few words in reply, to which Edward replied, "*Non so.*"

"He is asking you for more money," said Bertha, without moving an inch, and in too quiet a tone to be at all alarming.

"I have given him the right sum," replied Edward, seeming to forget, in the anxiety concerning this financial transaction, the rather peculiar circumstances under which he was travelling.

"Tell him that he must give you a crown more," said Bertha, in Italian, to the post-boy, and giving him at the same time a good-humoured little nod, which, while it propitiated the boy, was still further calculated, by its air of smiling indifference, to lull the suspicions of Edward.

Upon this hint the two post-boys began to be gaily clamorous; and when the disconcerted young man attempted to draw up the glass, the foremost of them put his hand upon it to prevent him.

"You must give it him," said Bertha, in the same easy tone; and then, without changing her voice or her attitude, she said to the boys, much in the tone she might have used if remonstrating with them, "*Ecco amici!* He is a mean wretch, who is running off with me against my will, because I am very rich. Save me from him, and you shall have fifty napoleons each."

"How? what?" they both exclaimed in the same breath, with true Italian vivacity.

"They are getting into a passion," said Bertha, addressing Edward, but still keeping herself immovably still in her corner; and then added in Italian, "Come round and open the door on my side; I will be in your arms in an instant, and fifty napoleons shall be yours!"

The first set of horses were taken off the carriage, and the second were not yet put on. The two lads passed under the pole in an instant, in another the door on Bertha's side was opened, and Bertha, according to promise, was in the arms of her deliverers. Edward sprang out after her, but she clung with all her strength to the lad who had caught her, while his companion very manfully kept Edward at a distance.

"Is there no one who speaks French here?" he exclaimed. "Is there nobody can understand me, while I explain to them that this unhappy young lady is my sister, and is insane? She has made her escape from her keepers, and I am now conveying her back to her wretched mother."

"Take me to the police," cried Bertha, firmly; "let them send for a physician, to decide whether I am mad or not."

"It will be barbarous if you detain her," said Edward, in French, addressing himself to the most decent-looking person in the crowd that was already assembling round them, and who was the only one there who appeared to understand him. "Think of the misery of her poor mother," he added in a piteous voice, and again making an effort to seize her.

The man to whom she clung resisted this attempt by giving Edward a pretty sharp blow on his head, upon which the decent-

looking stranger interfered, saying in Italian that let which would be right, and which wrong, it was not fitting to beat a strange gentleman about in that way, and that he feared mischief might come of it ; adding, that the safest course would be not to interfere at all, but to let the gentleman take care of the lady, as he was doubtless the fit person to do so. The frightened post-boy disengaged himself from Bertha's arms, and slunk away, for the speaker was one of the greatest men in the country, and steward moreover to a cardinal. In another moment Bertha would have been in the undisputed power of the young villain who had carried her off ; but in the instant that intervened between her being thrown off by the post-boy, and seized in the grasp of Edward, she espied an old man just emerging from a bye-path into the high-road, whose dress proclaimed him to be a priest. With the speed of lightning she darted towards him, and dropping on her knees at his feet, she exclaimed, "Save me, my father, save me from the villany of that young man, who is carrying me off by force, in order to marry me against my will, and get possession of my fortune."

"What does all this mean ?" said the good man. "Where does this young lady come from ?"

"From a mad-house, father," replied the man, to whom Edward had again and again repeated the same story. "This young gentleman is her brother, and only wants to take her back to her friends. Their mother, he says, will be in a desperate fright till she gets her back again, and it is likely enough she will."

"Reverend father, I am not mad," said Bertha, with the same admirable composure and presence of mind which she had shown from the very first moment that she discovered her situation ; but even if that young man's story were true, it would not be proper for me to be dragged thus across the country without the decent care of a female attendant, and in the charge of a person so ignorant as not to be able to make himself understood by the post-boys that drive him."

"There is reason in that, at any rate, Father Mark," said one of the standers-by, "nor does there seem to be anything like madness in the manner in which the young lady says it."

"I do assure you I am not mad," said Bertha, in reply, and looking at the person who had spoken with a sort of friendly smile. "But if that is not true I can tell you what is," she continued, in the same quiet tone : "my father is a very rich man, and I am his only child."

As all this was spoken in Italian, Edward understood not a word of it, and, quite at a loss to guess what was going on, he could only repeat in French :—

"Don't believe one single word of what she says ; she is raving mad, quite raving mad, as I am ready to swear before a magistrate. Take care that you don't believe her, for she is telling you nothing but lies."

"Do you understand Italian, young man?" said the priest, speaking in that language.

Edward stared at him, but did not answer.

"Why do you not answer me?" said the priest in French, and in a tone that seemed to express displeasure at his silence.

"Do not be angry with me for that, good sir," replied Edward, with very much humility. "I did not answer, because I did not understand you."

"You mean to say that you do not understand Italian?" said Father Mark.

"No, sir, I do not understand a word of it," replied the confused Edward.

"Then if you do not know what this young lady says, how can you be sure that she is telling lies?" said the old man.

"Because she is the greatest liar that ever lived," replied Edward, colouring.

"Then she is a sad, wicked girl, young man," replied the priest, "and should be both punished and admonished. But perhaps it may be a family failing, and as you are so very nearly related to her, it may not be quite safe to believe all you say. I am the curate of this parish, young gentleman; and as your sister, as you call her, has put herself under my protection, I will assist you, if you please, in taking her back to her friends. Here, boys, bring out your horses; we will all go on together."

Embarrassed greatly beyond the power of even attempting to extricate himself, Edward stood as still as if the old man's words had been a spell to fix him on the spot; and the nearest approach he made towards recovering himself, was the putting his hand to his forehead, to assist him in the act of deciding what he was to do next. The idea of proceeding with his elopement, encumbered with the presence of a venerable priest, whom he was aware it would be difficult to persuade that he would do well to unite him in holy matrimony to the lady who he had just offered to swear was his sister, was not to be dwelt upon for a moment. No! not even though he were to declare that they were both Roman Catholics, could he see any hope of turning this threatened companion to profit. Besides, the unfortunate youth, all bewildered as he was, felt convinced that if he persisted in going on, they should certainly not proceed a great many miles towards Scotland, without some very troublesome remonstrances on the part of the old gentleman. Must he then abandon his enterprise? The figure of his princely creditor seemed to rise before him as he stood, and his excited fancy caused him to start, much as he might have done had the kicking he so confidently anticipated been already applied.

The horses approached—they were fastened to the carriage—the postboys mounted—and a civil horse boy let down the steps of the vehicle for Bertha to mount. She immediately prepared to do so,

merely saying to the priest as a preliminary, "You have promised, holy father, to come with me"

"I have, my daughter, and I will keep my word," said the good man, who, though old, and a priest, had something of drollery in his look and manner, as he said to the disconsolate Edward, "Now then, young gentleman, be pleased to tell us, in your best French, which way the boys are to drive, in order to reach the residence of the distressed lady, your mother, with as little delay as possible."

"Let them drive to the devil!" said the heir of the Robertses, in very plain English; and then stepping into the carriage, because he felt it to be utterly impossible at that moment to dispose of his person in any other manner, he began letting down and drawing up the window with great violence.

Notwithstanding the strange and by no means agreeable position in which she found herself, it was positively not without some difficulty that Bertha prevented herself from laughing; and when Father Mark, turning towards her, gravely inquired what orders the young gentleman had given, she could not resist the temptation of translating his words literally; adding, however, with becoming sedateness, that if the reverend father would have the kindness to take her instructions instead, she would recommend that they should immediately return to Rome.

"Be it so, my daughter," said Father Mark. "I believe that with all your madness you will be the safer guide. To what part of Rome would you go, young lady? Is it true that you have a mother in Italy?"

This question effectually restored the gravity of poor Bertha, and for a moment she too was at a loss as to what orders she should give. At length, however, she turned to the good father with something in her look and voice that spoke more plainly of her bereavement than she had then leisure to do in words, and said:—"No, father, no; but I am not friendless. Here is the address of a relation, into whose hands I beg you will consign me," and as she spoke, she drew from her pocket the letter of Vincent, which contained the name of the hotel at which he was lodged.

"That is a much frequented hotel, young lady," said the priest, on hearing this address. "Have you been living there?"

"No," replied Bertha, colouring deeply, as she remembered that all she knew of the place whither she desired to be taken, was that three young men of her acquaintance were lodging there.

"Then wherefore, my child, should you wish to go to so very public a house of reception?" inquired Father Mark. "Why not return to the friends from whom you say this young man has violently withdrawn you?"

"Because they are *his* friends, and not *mine*," returned Bertha eagerly; "because his mother assisted in this wicked act, and that I know I should not be safe in her hands."

The good man began to feel the weight of the responsibility he was bringing upon himself. The story seemed alarmingly improbable, and he hesitated. Bertha saw it, and would have trembled, like all previous heroines under similar circumstances, had she not been sustained by the strong matter-of-fact sort of persuasion, that young Mr. Edward Roberts would find it quite impossible to convert her into Mrs. Edward Roberts against her will. She looked at Father Mark's vexed and harassed expression of countenance, nevertheless, with some anxiety, and said, "If your kindness, holy father, will induce you to go back with me to Rome, the friend to whose care I wish you to consign me will easily satisfy you as to his right to undertake the charge."

"It is a gentleman, then, my child, to whom you wish to go?" returned the old man, knitting his reverend brows. "Tell me what relation does he bear to you."

"He is my cousin, father," replied Bertha, blushing violently. "And of what age?" said the priest. "I don't know," replied Bertha, without looking at him.

The two post-boys looked at each other, and laughed. An extremely respectable-looking middle-aged female, who, seeing the priest in the crowd, had ventured to join it, shook her head very expressively, and walked away; and other women, less decorous in their appearance and behaviour, whispered together and tittered.

"It is impossible, daughter, quite impossible," said Father Mark, making a step or two backwards, "that I should take charge of a young lady upon the high road in this way, and then take her to a public hotel, and place her in the hands of a cousin, who, for anything I know, may be as young as herself, merely because she tells me that she should like to go to him. Upon my word," he added, looking round to the good people who had been so much more amused than edified by Bertha's proposal, "upon my word, though I am very sorry to say it, I think your proposal does look a little as if you were not in your right mind."

He was immediately answered by a buzz, made up of such words as "*si, si—securo*," and the like, all indicating the inclination of the parishioners, who were gathered round him, to agree with him in this opinion.

Edward, meanwhile, was not altogether idle. For the first minute or two after he had re-entered the carriage, he resigned himself to his position in hopeless despair of mending it; but the length of the discussion which followed suggested itself the idea that Miss Bertha might not have everything her own way yet; and having noted the retreating movement of the priest, he sprang from the carriage again, and, with great vehemence and volubility, repeated the statement he had before given, earnestly conjuring the puzzled old man to believe him, and adding, with a very ominous shake of the head, "That he knew not what he might bring upon himself by such unwarrantable interference."

"You are the strangest boy and girl that ever I chanced to meet with," said the priest. "Sure enough, it is likely a man, though he were ten times a curate, may get into a scrape if he meddles with what does not concern him, and worse still if he ventures to pass judgment upon matters that he does not understand. The young man talks of taking you to his mother, young lady; and whether she be his mother or yours, or, as he is ready to swear, the mother of both, it sounds at any rate like a more decent proposal than your own, which, truth to say, seems nothing better than desiring to be taken to a public hotel, and given over to the protection of a young cousin. For had he been an old one, you would have been sure to have said so."

"Let them go as they came, Father Mark," said the best-dressed man of the whole circle that had gathered round them. "No blame, you know, can follow that, for they are but heretics after all. But the blessed saints only know what may come of your taking away a beautiful young lady from one gentleman, and handing her over to another."

"By Saint Antonio signore, I am afraid you say true," returned the alarmed father. "If they were true, faithful, and believing servants of his holiness," and here he crossed himself, "it would be quite a different matter. But, as it is, I should be in great danger of doing more wrong than right by interfering." And having thus spoken, he deliberately turned round and began to walk away.

"Stay, father!" cried Bertha, stepping rapidly but not vehemently after him. "As I have failed to make you understand the propriety of my being conveyed to the only relation I have in Rome, let me ask you if you are happy enough to know the holy Father Maurizio, of the Santa Consolazione?"

"Do I know him, my daughter?" returned Father Mark, suddenly turning back. "Instead of answering your question, let me ask you the same: do you know him?"

"Yes, father, I do. It is to the convent of the Santa Consolazione that I now implore you to take me," said Bertha, solemnly, "and he will thank you for the service, better than I can do it myself."

"You are known to the holy Father Maurizio, of the Santa Consolazione?" cried Father Mark again. "That makes all the difference in the world, my daughter."

"Young man," he added, approaching Edward, who had placed himself at the side of Bertha, and seemed ready to seize upon her, "young man, if you will take my advice, you will return to Rome by the public diligence, which will change horses here in about half an hour; and I will undertake to place this young lady in such protection as none of her friends can object to."

And, so saying, he courteously presented his hand to the well-pleased Bertha, who, gratefully accepting it, mounted the carriage, and had the extreme satisfaction of seeing the venerable priest follow her, and settle himself in the place which the blooming Ed-

ward had occupied before. In another moment the door was closed upon them, the whips cracked, and they set off full gallop for Rome.

CHAPTER LI.

THE distance between the little village where the foregoing scenes took place, and the gates of Rome, was not great ; but long before it had been passed over by Bertha and her reverend companion, the most perfect and pleasant good intelligence was established between them. And the good Father Mark's spirits being soothed by the mention of Father Maurice's name into a state of perfect tranquillity, he became equally able and willing to appreciate the truth of poor Bertha's painful narrative, and the good sense and presence of mind which had enabled her to exchange the protection of Mr. Edward Roberts for that of so respectable an individual as himself. Having thus satisfactorily rescued her from all the pains and perils incidental to such an adventure as that of which our gallant young Englishman had made her the heroine, we may leave her for a while in order to follow our more legitimate heroine, Mrs. Roberts, on her return to Rome, after she had performed her part of it.

Had Luigi Mondorlo, Miss Harrington's valet-de-place, been of the party, the sudden transferring of that young lady's person from her own carriage to that of the bold Edward would probably not have been so easily achieved ; for in all the evil which this sagacious Italian had invented and propagated respecting her, there was not the slightest shade of ill-will ; on the contrary, he thought her one of the most charming *signorinas* he had ever seen in his life ; and the fact of such transmission being against her will, which was made manifest by the melodramatic circumstance of the muffling mantle, would have been fully sufficient to rouse the Roman spirit of Luigi to attempt her rescue. But with her coachman it was quite a different affair ; with him she had literally never exchanged a single word. He was a taciturn personage, of no very prepossessing appearance, who had constantly received his orders from the lips, and his wages from the hands of Luigi, and who took little more part in the scene which followed, when his carriage was met by that of Edward, than an automaton might have done. He evidently thought it was some gallant adventure, in which he had no concern ; and it was only when Mrs. Roberts, very unnecessarily, displayed a piece of gold between her fingers, as she made a sign to him that he was to come down from his box, and close the carriage-door upon her—a ceremony which none of poor Bertha's already departed *cortège* had thought it necessary to perform—it was only then that he began to feel the slightest interest in the affair. And even then, though he promptly obeyed the signal, performed the service required, and received his reward, he mounted his box

again, and drove the lady back to her lodgings with precisely the same degree of indifference that he had driven her from them. His month's wages had been paid him in advance; he had already received an intimation from Luigi that his services would not be required when that term was over; and therefore the young gentleman's driving off with the young lady, either with or without her consent, was a circumstance much too unimportant to arouse any feeling whatever. He was not in love with the young lady, and he was therefore not jealous of the young gentleman, so what *could* he find to interest him in the adventure?

Mrs. Roberts looked radiantly triumphant as she mounted the stairs to her drawing-room. She had been a little anxious about getting home before her daughters, because, proud as she was of her own share of the transaction, as well as of the glorious success which had attended it, she did not quite like that anybody should know that it was *she* who, in the first instance, had run off with the young lady. But all anxiety on this score was removed, the moment she perceived that it was a female who opened the door for her. Had the young ladies returned, the man-servant would have returned with them; and as, next to attending the carriage, his most strenuously enjoined duty was to make himself visible the moment the door of their dwelling was unclosed, she instantly felt herself relieved from the only uneasy feeling that interfered with her perfect contentment. Her first act on entering her drawing-room was to throw herself into an arm-chair, clasp her hands, and piously exclaim, "Thank God, that's done!" And then she got up and looked in the glass, to see that her curls were not deranged in consequence of the slight flick she had received from the corner of the cloak, as it had been thrown over Bertha by the spirited hand of her dear son. But she found herself looking exceedingly well, and quite as a lady ought to do who was mother-in-law to an heiress. And then, feeling rather thirsty, she unlocked the cupboard, and presented herself with a small tumbler full of Ovietto, after taking which she felt greatly refreshed, and immediately set about doing all that was proper and right under the circumstances. In the first place she went to the door of Bertha's room, and knocked at it repeatedly, quite loudly enough for the solitary maid-servant to hear her. She might, perhaps, have thought it judicious to address some inquiries to this grim-looking performer of all work, could she have managed to make herself understood in the same admirable manner that she had done in Paris; but this being beyond her power, she contented herself with making her reiterated knockings at the door of Bertha audible to the whole house; and then she sought her dozing husband in the little room allotted to him, where she pretty well knew she should find him engaged in sleeping away the last tedious hour before dinner. Nor was she disappointed; there he was, poor man! seated upon one rush-bottomed chair, with his heels on another—a silk pocket-

handkerchief over his head, to defend him from the attacks of the flies, his large fingers, with very dirty nails, interlaced upon his stomach, and, though not quite asleep, as near to it as he could possibly contrive to get; his whole appearance being as little in accordance with the flashy finery of his race as it is well possible to imagine.

"Roberts! Roberts!" vociferated his gayer half, "for Heaven's sake, don't lay up snoozing there any longer, when there are such strange things going on in the house! Get up, I tell you, this very minute. What do you think has happened, my dear?"

"Happened!" replied the poor nervous gentleman, pulling the handkerchief off his head, and dropping his heels upon the ground, "happened, wife? There is nobody come for money, is there?"

Mrs. Roberts laughed aloud. "Are you not grown into a perfect curmudgeon, Roberts?" said she. "You are for ever living in a fright about money; when you know very well, let the things go as much against us as they will, I have always taken care that nothing really bad should come of it."

"Then nothing particular *has* happened?" he returned. "Thank God!"

"Yes, you stupid man, but there has, though, and something that I have long told you would happen, though nobody but a fairy could say exactly *when*. Your son, Mr. Roberts, has eloped with the daughter of Sir Christopher Harrington."

"The devil he has!" exclaimed the old gentleman, looking one-third frightened and two-thirds pleased. "Well, I am sure I can't help it. Boys and girls will be making love if they are thrown together. Her family and friends chose to send her amongst us. It was no doing of mine. I couldn't help Edward being so handsome, you know."

"No, my dear," replied his wife, "of course you couldn't; but it will make a great noise, you may be sure of that. However, it can't do us anything but good, any way. I always observe that it turns out to the advantage of girls when any accident calls all eyes upon them. Everybody is wanting to dance with them and to talk to them. It is just the sort of thing to get them on."

"God grant it, my dear!" replied the affectionate father. "I am sure—"

But before he could finish the sentence his two daughters entered the room, so gaily attired, and looking, as he thought, so very much like ladies of high fashion, that his long-depressed spirits became suddenly elevated, and he exclaimed,—

"Well, my dear Sarah, I should not wonder, after all, if everything turned out just as you have said."

"There would be a great deal more cause to wonder, Mr. Roberts, if it did not prove so," she replied. "I know myself, sir, though sometimes, I am sorry to say, it is plain enough that you do not know me. However, we will not begin quarrelling about that now."

And then, with a very becoming degree of gravity, she informed her daughters of the event which had taken place.

"Eloped, has she?" said Agatha, with an expressive sneer. "I always suspected that there was something at the bottom of all her pretended disdain. Edward is a very handsome fellow, and as peculiarly elegant and fashionable as she is the reverse. I dare say the reason of her constant ill-humour was, that she was always jealous of him. I am not at all surprised at this termination of the affair."

"What a fellow Edward is, mamma!" exclaimed Maria, with an air of great exultation. "He always said, you know, that he could marry her whenever he pleased, and I am sure he has proved that his words were true."

Altogether, the Roberts family might fairly be said to have reconciled themselves to the event before their dinner was ended; and the three ladies were sitting in full talk together, during the easy hour which always preceded the solemn business of the evening toilet, when the drawing-room door was thrown open, and "Mr. Vincent" announced.

The party with which he had been associated when last they had met was still, notwithstanding all that had passed since, too interesting for either of the young ladies to behold him without a visible start, and a change of complexion, which showed plainly enough that Baden-Baden and its Balcony House were not forgotten. Nor was Mrs. Roberts herself unmoved by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Vincent. His relationship to the young lady of whom she had just disposed in a manner so little likely to be approved by her family, did certainly for a moment or two make her feel rather uncomfortable, and she rose up and sat down again, in a style which plainly showed that she did not feel quite at her ease.

It was Agatha, as might indeed have been reasonably expected, who was the first to recover her composure sufficiently to address their visitor.

"How do, Mr. Vincent?" said she, in her latest lisp, and with her newest finish of pretty negligence. "Where are your two friends fled to? Have you actually lost them altogether?"

"No, Miss Roberts," he replied, "they are still with me. We are all at the same hotel. They will both, I am sure, take an early opportunity of paying their compliments to you; but to two such ardent spirits the first entering Rome has something so overpowering in it, that every other feeling seems suspended till the first salaams have been made to its marble magnates. Had I not been peculiarly anxious, from accidental causes, to inquire for the health and welfare of my young cousin, Miss Harrington, I too might at this moment perhaps be standing to gaze at the effects of this fine moonlight night on the Colosseum. Permit me to beg, Mrs. Roberts, that she may be told I am here."

During the whole of this speech Mrs. Roberts had been very

sensibly telling herself that it was no good to get frightened, and that there was nothing for it but to put a bold face upon the matter; she therefore endeavoured to look exceedingly facetious as she replied, "As to sending a message to your cousin Bertha, Mr. Vincent, it is not quite so easily done as said. I wash my hands of the whole business. Those who sent her into a family where there was so captivating a man as Edward, must answer for the mischief, if mischief it is; but the fact is, Mr. Vincent, that your cousin eloped with my son this very morning."

Mr. Vincent changed colour, but replied with a very respectable degree of composure and self-command, "I am happy, Mrs. Roberts, to have it in my power to assure you that an event which, if it *could* have taken place, you would have such serious reason to deplore, has not occurred. I have myself seen my cousin, Miss Harrington, driving very composedly about the streets of Rome this morning, but I lost sight of her carriage before I could overtake it. Pray tell me what can have suggested to you the idea of an elopement?"

"Why, where is she, sir? The thing is obvious," replied Mrs. Roberts, with rather a scornful smile. "We have seen plainly enough, all of us, how the thing was likely to end. The young lady has been passionately in love with my son for months, and I am sure I don't know how we were to prevent it. For a great while she managed to deceive us all completely, but since we have been in Rome she has been less cautious, and it was impossible not to see what was going on."

Poor Vincent began to be dreadfully terrified. The vehemence of his cousin's love for Mr. Roberts junior did not indeed alarm him much; but the more audaciously Mrs. Roberts lied on this point, the more strongly he suspected that some most atrocious villany had been practised against the unfortunate and unprotected Bertha. For one short moment a feeling of indignant rage had nearly overpowered him; and had the proclaimer of Bertha's passionate love for Mr. Edward been a male instead of a female, it is probable that not all his philosophy would have sufficed to prevent his forgetting the decorum befitting a gentleman. Even as it was, however, he was instantly conscious that the species of emotion which had rushed through his whole frame while listening to Mrs. Roberts's statement must be as useless to poor Bertha as degrading to himself; and by a strong effort he succeeded in assuming an aspect of very dignified composure as he said, "In what manner, ma'am, were you made acquainted with this elopement? It must have taken place after I saw Miss Harrington leave St. Peter's this morning."

Mrs. Roberts would have been very much less embarrassed had the cousin of her intended daughter-in-law given way to the rage he had so powerfully struggled to subdue. She would vastly have preferred a box on the ear to the temperate question which he

now asked. In fact, it was a question by no means easy for her to answer.

In what manner had she become acquainted with the elopement?

If her own dear girls, if even poor dear drowsy Mr. Roberts himself, had asked the same question, she would have felt a good deal at a loss how to answer it. She did not mean to tell anybody that in the first instance it was she herself who had eloped with the young lady; and if she had made an exception in favour of any one, it certainly would not have been Mr. Vincent. In short, that happened to her now which had never happened to her before. She remained silent, because she could not find a word to say.

Mr. Vincent repeated his question, and then Mrs. Roberts took out her pocket-handkerchief, and having wept behind its shelter for a minute or two, she said, "I do think, Mr. Vincent, that you are treating me in a most impertinent and extraordinary manner! What right, sir, have you to come here bullying me, because a young lady has thought proper to fall in love with my son and run away with him? All I know is, that I have seen a great deal going on that I would not have suffered for a single instant in my own girls; but Irish young ladies, I suppose, are brought up differently. However, as to my knowing about it, all I know is, that the young lady went out early this morning, and is not yet returned—I know also that Edward is nowhere to be found; and what can I, or anybody else think, who has seen them together as I have done, but that they have eloped?"

Mr. Vincent looked at her steadfastly for a moment, and then replied, "I too have seen them together, Mrs. Roberts; and I tell you plainly and sincerely, madam, that I do not believe my cousin has eloped with your son. That it may be his purpose, and yours also, that she should become his wife, is highly probable, and in this it must be my object to prevent you from succeeding."

Mrs. Roberts now found herself precisely in the position of a sharply-hunted animal, whose only resource is to turn and stand at bay; and her spirit was not of a quality to shrink from doing so.

"What excessive nonsense you are talking, Mr. Vincent!" said she, in a tone of the very coolest defiance. "I really had conceived a much higher idea of your understanding than it appears to deserve. I should be excessively sorry to be guilty of the very least rudeness to any one connected with our dear Bertha—whom, notwithstanding this little imprudence, I shall receive with all the affection of a mother—but I really must take the freedom of telling you that I think your language exceedingly impertinent, and that the sooner you get out of my house, the better I shall be pleased."

"It may be so, madam," replied Vincent, very quietly, "but I cannot release you from the annoyance of my presence till you have been pleased to communicate all you know respecting the movements of your son."

"Indeed, sir, I must say you are very troublesome," replied Mrs.

Roberts, looking very proud and scornful. "The connection between our families can in no degree excuse it. Agatha, my dear, though this gentleman has degraded himself by being a tutor till he has quite forgotten what good manners are, I will not, for our dear Bertha's sake, actually turn him out of doors. But really you and Maria must immediately go and dress. The dear princess will never forgive us if we are too late; so go, dear loves, and get dressed, and I will follow the example as soon as Mr. Vincent will have the kindness to release me."

"Good gracious, mamma!" cried Maria, with much feeling, "there is nothing in the whole world that would vex me so much as our quarrelling with any of dear Bertha's relations. Why, my dear Mr. Vincent, should you think it necessary to quarrel with us because Edward and Bertha have fallen in love with each other? Is it not being very absurd?"

Vincent paused, as if considering how he should reply. He was becoming more seriously alarmed every moment; and this amiable and conciliatory speech from the fair Maria was very far from lessening this painful feeling. It showed a sort of harmonious accord in the projects of the family, that made him feel a sensation almost of terror, as he remembered how completely Bertha had been in their power. The having seen her but a few hours before was now his best source of hope; for let them have done what they would, it was impossible she could be at any great distance, and it was evident that his only chance of finding her lay in extracting all the information possible from those who, he doubted not, knew all the circumstances connected with her disappearance. It was therefore with great civility that he assured Miss Maria of his not feeling the least wish to quarrel, but that he was very desirous of learning every particular relative to the unexpected circumstance to which she alluded. But this restraint upon his feelings availed him little. Miss Maria had not the power of affording him any information, and her mother had not the will. So far, indeed, was she from uttering anything calculated to throw light upon the mystery, she seemed to take peculiar pleasure in exaggerating every falsehood she thought most likely to torment him. She very shrewdly suspected the real state of poor Vincent's carefully concealed feelings towards his cousin, and ceased not to reduplicate her assurances that *nothing* could have turned "poor dear Bertha" from her passionate attachment to Edward. "In fact," she said, "nothing but *that* would ever have put the notion of marrying her into dear Edward's head."

It was just as she pronounced these words, and at the very moment when the patience of Vincent was about to give way before his vehement indignation, that the door of the room was suddenly opened, and the pale face of the discomfited Edward made visible.

CHAPTER LII.

It is by no means improbable that the sight of Mr. Vincent might have caused a retrograde movement on the part of the young adventurer, had the powerfully excited feelings of his athletic parent permitted it ; but any such measure was rendered impossible by her springing towards him with outstretched arms, and seizing upon his two shoulders with a very effective gripe, as she exclaimed, "In the name of Heaven, boy, what brings you back again?"

If ever a human being did or could look like a whipped cur, the unlucky Edward Roberts certainly displayed the resemblance at that moment ; nor did the manner in which he was greeted by his devoted mother in any degree tend to lessen it. In the extremity of her astonishment and disappointment, she seemed totally to overlook the presence of the stranger, and began her agonized interrogatories very much as if they had been alone. The poor boy literally trembled from head to foot ; yet, nevertheless, he endeavoured to bully his mother, bidding her mind her own business, and not meddle with what she did not understand.

"Not understand it, you villain!" she exclaimed ; "not understand it ? Who should understand it," she continued, shaking him violently, "if I don't?"

"For Heaven's sake, ma'am, let us be alone, if you please, before you attack my brother in this way," said Agatha. "If their carriage has broken down, or anything of that sort has happened, it is no good for you to fly at him about it. Come with me, Edward, and tell me where you have left your young wife, and all about it."

This presence of mind on the part of Agatha produced an immediate and powerful effect on her mother and brother. The former relaxed her hold, and began to laugh at her own nervous vehemence ; while the latter made a very manly struggle to overcome his dismay, and replied to his sister by saying lightly, nay, almost gaily,—“Oh ! you need not be uneasy about Bertha, my dear Agatha ; I can satisfy you about her by a single word.”

"But you must first satisfy me, if you please," said Vincent, seizing the youth by his arm as he was about to repass the door. "I quit you not till you tell me where you have concealed my cousin, Miss Harrington. Speak, sir, this instant. Where is she?"

"If you were to claw me ten times more like a bear than you do," replied Edward, "I could not content you. I'll be d—d if I know where she is. Gone to the devil, I hope. Take your hand off, Mr. Vincent. It is cowardly to hold me because you think you are stronger than I am."

"Speak but as truly concerning my cousin," returned Vincent,

removing his hand, "and you shall receive no further injury from me. Where have you taken her? Where have you left her?"

"It was she who left me," returned young Roberts, knitting his brows, and trying to look fierce.

"Mr. Roberts," said Vincent, "I am willing to believe that you have only committed a folly, from which you were ready to desist as soon as you found that you had misunderstood the feelings of Miss Harrington. Tell me where she is, and I pledge my word that neither you nor your family shall ever be troubled on the subject more."

"And I would tell you, sir, as soon as look at you, if I had the means to know," replied Edward; "but, as I hope to be saved, I no more know where she is than you do."

Of the truth of this assertion Vincent entertained not the slightest doubt. There are many persons who have a sort of instinct for knowing when truth is spoken to them, and he was one of them. He immediately acknowledged this conviction by saying, "I have no doubt, sir, that you are telling me the truth. Yet there must be circumstances concerning Miss Harrington's manner of leaving you which it would be important for me to know. Do not force me to insist upon your communicating these, but as a matter of courtesy tell me at once all you know about her."

Vincent had touched the right chord. The unlucky youth felt himself so bothered and bruised by all his recent adventures, that the civility with which Mr. Vincent now addressed him soothed him into a much more amiable tone of mind than he had been in for some days past; and he replied, courteously enough, "Upon my honour and word, Mr. Vincent, I have not the very least idea in the world where she is. It is no good going over the whole thing again from the beginning. I suppose I must have been mistaken in fancying that she liked me so much as I thought she did. Or it might be, you know, that when we were fairly off she might have felt frightened about her father. But at any rate it is quite certain, that after we had got one stage out of Rome, she took it into her head that she had rather not go any further; but, of course, you know, I was too much in love with her to turn round and drive her back again the moment she asked me, and so I told her. And then she told me that, whether I liked it or not, she would go back; and while we were arguing the point, which was just as we were stopping to change horses, she put her head out of the carriage window and called to an old priest who was passing, and began jabbering away in Italian with him, a great deal faster than I could understand, but I found at last that she had begged him to take care of her back to Rome, and back to Rome she came; but where he has taken her I have no more notion than you have."

Here Mr. Edward Roberts ceased, and Mr. Vincent began

to ponder his words. There was a good deal of what he had uttered that he did not believe—having pretty good reason to know, for instance, that it was quite impossible the young gentleman should ever have been deceived for an instant as to the real amount of Miss Harrington's affection for him ; but he had nevertheless very perfect faith in his assurance of ignorance as to her present situation ; and though this uncertainty rendered him very wretched, he derived considerable consolation from believing that the individual to whom she had entrusted herself was respectable, both from his age and profession. Again and again he made the now docile Edward recapitulate his statement ; nor did he leave him, and his very gloomy-looking mother and sisters, till he had convinced himself that no further information could possibly be obtained from them. And then he went back to his hotel, in miserable uncertainty of what was best to be done for the recovery of the precious being whom he now felt he ought never to have lost sight of.

Before he reached his hotel he had made up his mind that he would set off post for the village at which young Roberts had told him they had changed horses, thinking it possible that he might there learn something of the priest who had been her companion : but before horses could be put to Lord Lynberry's carriage, which he had no scruple of borrowing during the absence of its owner, he remembered that it was possible Bertha might have received his letter, containing his address, before her constrained departure from Rome ; and if so, he felt persuaded, as he remembered all the proofs she had so innocently and frankly given of unbounded reliance upon him, that it was to him that she would have desired her reverend protector to restore her. If these conjectures were well founded, the leaving Rome would be leaving her ; yet the remaining there in this lingering sort of uncertainty was more than he could bear, and after enduring a few more tormenting minutes of vacillation between the to go or not to go, he ordered the carriage to be put back, while he returned to the domicile of the Robertses, in order to ascertain, if possible, whether Bertha had received his letter or not.

He was rather startled, upon again entering their drawing-room, to perceive, that though the party which occupied it was the same which he had left there about an hour before, their condition appeared to have undergone a very violent change. In one corner of the room Miss Maria was kneeling upon the floor in an agony of tears. On the sofa Miss Agatha was lying, as if exhausted by great exertion ; while the mother and son were standing near the middle of the room, having a table between them, and with an aspect and gestures which, joined to the raised tones he had caught as he approached, left no doubt on his mind of the disagreeable fact that they were in the act of quarrelling violently.

Under less pressing circumstances, he would certainly have left

the room without giving them time to perceive that he was in it ; but this was no moment for ceremony ; and hastily approaching Mrs. Roberts, without looking to the right or the left upon her disconsolate daughters, he said, " I beg your pardon, Mrs. Roberts, nor will I detain you a moment if you can answer me this one question : Did my cousin Bertha receive a letter by the post before she left Rome ? "

" No—yes—I don't know," replied the unfortunate Mrs. Roberts, whose red face and distended eyes indicated too much agitation to render it worth while to question her further : but Vincent was desperate, and appeared inclined to persevere in his inquiry, when Edward, who certainly desired no witness to what was going on between himself and his family, rendered any such perseverance needless by saying, shortly and distinctly, " Yes, Mr. Vincent, she did. She had the letter in her hand all the time we were together, and I don't believe she left off reading for a moment, so I can speak to that fact with certainty."

This prompt reply produced the desired effect. Mr. Vincent paused not to give another glance at the family group, but instantly left the room, and returned to his hotel, relieved at least from the misery of not knowing what line of conduct to decide upon. He not only decided upon remaining in Rome, but went to bed with a sort of feeling at his heart which made him very considerably less miserable than he had been before he entered the stormy drawing-room of the Robertses.

CHAPTER LIII.

AND the Robertses ? How were they engaged, both before and after this visit ? No sooner had Mr. Vincent the first time taken his departure, than Mrs. Roberts renewed the attack upon her son, which had been so skilfully stopped by Agatha when he was present.

" And now, sir," said she, " be pleased to account to me as politely and a little more truly than you have been doing to your friend the tutor, how you have managed to lose hold of the girl whom I placed in so masterly a manner in your hands ? "

" To answer you more truly than I did my friend the tutor is impossible, ma'am ; but by way of politeness, I can make you a bow, if you please," replied her son, drawing his heels together and making her a low bow.

" I won't bear this !" returned the irritated Mrs. Roberts, stamping her foot upon the ground. " Gracious Heaven ! After all I have done, am I to be told by a sneering puppy of a boy that he has let the golden prize slip through his fingers, and then returned to laugh at me ? Agatha, I shall go mad ! Make him tell you where the girl is. You know not, any of you, how necessary it is that we should have and hold her and her money for ever. If we fail in getting this girl, the game is up with us."

"Don't go on making a fool of yourself, Edward," said his elder sister, with a good deal of severity. "This is evidently no time for jesting."

"Hold your tongue, Agatha! You are a devilish clever girl in some things, but you understand no more about the affairs of men than a baby. As to not jesting, indeed, I am perfectly ready to obey you, being greatly more tempted to blow my brains out than to laugh."

"How can you try to frighten us by talking in such a horrid, disgusting way, Edward?" said Maria, beginning to cry, "and we kept all this time from going to dress! Do come, Agatha, will you? I have the most particular reason in the world for wishing to be in good time to-night. I don't know what may not depend upon it!"

"Maria, you are an idiot," said the young man, "and as for you, Agatha," he continued, turning to the eldest sister, "though you are not an idiot, you are an ignoramus. But my mother is neither the one nor the other, if she does not let her temper get the better of her. So now, ma'am, be so good as to hear me, if you please; and don't let us begin by quarrelling, for it won't answer, you may depend upon it. As to your young devil incarnate, Miss Bertha, I tell you fairly, that even if I knew what was become of her, I never would, as long as I have breath in my body, attempt anything more in the matrimonial way with her. You know as well as I do that I always hated her like poison, although I never let this make the least difference. But it's no good to mince the matter. The thing's no go, mother, and you may as well give it up first as last."

"But I will not give it up, sir!" screamed his strongly-excited parent. "Give it up? Gracious Heaven! Don't I know the monstrous sums I have squeezed out of your father on purpose to keep things going till I could make you set about the business in earnest! And a pretty job you have made of it at last! Oh! I shall go mad! I am quite sure I shall go mad!"

"And what do you think I shall do, ma'am?" cried Maria, wringing her hands. "The truth comes out at last. You say yourself now that you only squeezed out the money for the sake of Edward, so it is much that Agatha and I have to thank you for! And yet, cruel and unkind as you are, I have never for a moment lost sight of what you said ought to be our first object; and now, at the very moment when I am quite sure of succeeding, both as to the affections of my heart, and prudent conformity to your wishes in every respect, you stand here scolding Edward about a thing that is past and over, instead of going to dress for the Princess Yabiolporakiosky's ball! and yet everything depends upon my meeting him this very night!"

A sudden thought struck Mrs. Roberts as she heard these words, and for a moment a feeling of reviving hope for Maria overpowered her fears for Edward. She recollected the visit of Mr. Vincent.

and the expression of her countenance changed, and her voice almost softened into a whisper, as she said, "Has Lynberry written to you, Maria? Is it Lord Lynberry whom you expect to meet to-night?"

"Lord Lynberry, ma'am!" returned Maria, with such a mixture of scorn and indignation as made her look quite sublime, "Lord Lynberry! What a pitiful, poor-spirited creature you must take me for! No, ma'am. However badly you and Edward, between you, may have managed his affairs, mine have fortunately been left to myself. Agatha can tell you, if she chooses to do so, what the attentions of Prince Filippo Odoronto have been; and there was that in his manner, when he engaged me for the first waltz to-night, which convinced me."

"Why, you silly fool!" said her brother, interrupting her, "Prince Filippo Odoronto is married."

"Married!" returned Maria, with a contemptuous smile, "about as much married as you are, Master Edward. Give me leave to know what concerns myself, if you please. The words which Prince Filippo said to me, as he gave me my bouquet the night before last, could not have been spoken by any married man."

Mr. Edward's reply to this was a short whistle, and then, turning to his mother, he resumed what he very naturally thought a more important subject.

"I don't think you will do any good by listening to the history of Maria's love just at this moment, ma'am; it will be more to the purpose, I believe, to tell me straightforward whether you can get my father to draw a cheque large enough to satisfy the claims of Frederigo Paulovino upon me?"

"No!" was the succinct reply of his mother.

"Then I advise you not to show yourselves in any drawing-room in Rome, either to-night or any other night. I know you will get affronted if you do."

"If your conduct has really been such as to bring such a consequence upon us, Edward," said Agatha, colouring to the temples, "you deserve—" but there she stopped.

"You are quite at liberty to go on, Miss Agatha," he replied. "I believe that when the cards turn against a man, his friends and relations generally turn after them; but that is a point of no consequence whatever. If this money can be paid, I am ready and willing to start afresh, and hope for better luck for the future; but if it cannot, the game is up with us all."

"You are talking the most outrageous nonsense possible, Edward!" cried Agatha, vehemently. "What on earth can it signify, as far as the manner of our being received in society is concerned, whether you lose or win?"

"As far as winning and receiving a handful of naps one night, Miss Agatha, or losing and paying them another, you are perfectly right in supposing that you could not by possibility have any-

thing whatever to do with it. But you are more behind-hand in your education than I should have thought possible, if you don't know that a fellow who pockets his winnings and shirks paying his losings, is liable at any hour of the day or night to be kicked about like a dog; and that the loveliest women that ever trod the earth, if they are related to him, can no more hope to be well received by people of fashion, than if they were known to be infected with the plague."

"Then how have you dared, young villain as you are, to betray us into so dreadful a situation?" returned Agatha with vehemence. "You are, if this be true, a reptile unfit to live! knowing, as you so evidently did, that you were risking our destruction, yet persisting in your villanous course just because it amused you! Edward, you are a monster!"

"You may call me what names you like, my pretty young lady, and I will be generous enough not to call names in return, although——however, that is no matter. I will just observe, however, that you are quite mistaken in supposing that I ever risked a farthing for the sake of amusing myself. It has, I assure you, been quite a matter of business throughout. I wanted money, and I had no other means of getting it. What the devil was I to do? You would not have had me go begging, I suppose? Besides, I have another excuse, if any excuse were wanted for a young fellow who has done nothing worse than all men of real fashion do every day of their lives. I had every reason to hope, that if luck ran against me, I should be able to make Sir Christopher Harrington pay the damages."

"Well, sir, and so you might," cried his mother vehemently. "Did I not place her——" but suddenly recollecting that the "*dear chucks*," her daughters, were to be innocent of her part of the elopement, she checked herself, and then added—"upon all occasions as much within your reach as possible?"

"Yes, ma'am, I can't deny that you did your part of the business admirably, excepting that you did not give me quite money enough for the job. I might have been married to the little devil by this time, in some way or other, if I could but have afforded to take a courier."

"Do you mean to stand talking here all night?" cried Maria, clasping her hands imploringly. "I tell you all, and I tell you no more than the truth, that everything depends upon my going to the princess's ball to-night."

"And I tell you," replied her brother, "that as far as your affairs are concerned you had much better stay at home. Filippo Odoronto is married, I tell you."

"And how do you know, you vile gambler, you, that he may not get a divorce?" replied the enraged Maria. "Or how do you know, you wicked, selfish wretch!" she added, "how do you know that I might not meet Lord Lynberry there to-night, and

set everything right again in that quarter? Oh! it is too, too hard!"

It seemed as if there were something in these last words of her daughter Maria which particularly irritated the unfortunate Mrs. Roberts. Perhaps she felt that there was a species of vagueness in the nature of that pretty young lady's hopes, which partook a great deal of the character of despair. Whatever the cause might be, however, she seemed at this moment to lose her patience altogether, and stepping forwards with rapid strides to the table at which Edward was standing, she said, with a raised arm and thundering voice,

"I'll make an end of it at once, children, for I am tired of it all. I have toiled and slaved like a negro to do the best I could for you all, but it is all in vain. You are a parcel of selfish, headstrong, extravagant fools; and I don't believe that if you had a dozen such mothers as I am, with all my good management, knowledge of the world, and unwearied industry, it would be enough to save you from destruction. But I shall go on no longer in this way, I promise you. I shall go directly to your father, and tell him the exact state of the case. I have done all that a devoted mother could do, and I will strive and strain no more. There is but one thing to be done, that is as clear as light. Don't you understand what I mean, Agatha?"

"I neither know nor care what you mean, ma'am," replied her fair counsellor. "You must know as well as I do that no maudlin half measures ever can answer. I have told you so a thousand times over. I know, from the very best authority, that more than half of the peculiarly elegant and fashionable-looking English who take the lead in all the first circles on the continent, are completely ruined, in the vulgar, old-fashioned sense of the word. But where there is beauty in the young, and common sense in the old, such people may, and do, go on for years enjoying every pleasure that life can bestow, and without being one atom worse off at last than we seem to be now. But then, of course, they are not disgraced by having a swindling blackleg belonging to them! Edward ought to leave us instantly, and go to New Zealand or Australia, or something of that sort, and we ought to go on immediately to Naples."

"But not till we have been to one more ball," cried Maria, suddenly dropping upon her knees, "oh, let me try what I can do at one more ball, if you have any pity!"

Mrs. Roberts was in the act of making rather a spirited answer to this appeal, when Mr. Vincent entered the room in the manner described in the last chapter.

CHAPTER LIV.

ONCE more left to themselves, the unfortunate family appeared to have gained time for reflection from the interruption; for the

mutual reproaches seemed to have ceased, and for a few moments after the door had closed upon the intruder, they all remained profoundly silent. The first sound heard was a deep sigh from the bosom of the fair Maria ; but now this sign of woe, instead of being noticed with severity, produced only a responding sigh from her mother, together with the gentle words, "Don't go on fretting so, Maria ; that can't do any good to anybody."

"You never said a truer word than that, Mrs. Roberts," said the son, evidently relieved by the comparative calm in which he found himself. "and if you could teach the girls to be as reasonable as yourself, I would answer for it that I would show you a way in no time to creep out of this confounded hole that we have got into."

"Well, speak, Edward," replied his mother, meekly, "I am so sick of plotting and planning for everybody, and never finding any single thing answer, that I am ready and willing to listen."

"Well, then, you have spoken out about *your* money matters, so it is but fair that I should speak out about *mine*. There is scarcely a shop in Rome where a man of fashion could get an article of any sort to please him, where I have not got a bill. Sometimes I went in with one first-rate fellow, and sometimes with another, and more than once I have asked some of your fine-lady friends to set me down at the shops where there was something I wanted ; and in this way I have got credit to a larger amount than it is any use to talk about ; for if the game is up, it matters little whether it is fifty or fifty thousand that our creditors are to whistle for. Well then, it is as clear as daylight that there is but one thing to do, and that is to flit. We shall not be the first family who have performed that admirable piece, 'We fly by night,' in concert. The carriage will be here presently to take us to this ball that Maria is making such a riot about ; and if you will take my advice, you will bundle us all into it and be off. The money that you gave me for the purpose of obtaining the possession of Miss Bertha will help to take us. We must go to that place by the sea—Civita something or other—and stick to the steam-boats as long as possible ; and then get on as cheap as we can to Ostend, or Havre, or Calais, or some of those places where people live upon nothing, they say, and if they have a mind for it can make a splash in a quiet way."

"And why not live upon nothing here, Edward ?" said Agatha, rising from the sofa. "I have been told over and over again that it is the very easiest thing in the world, nor have I any doubt that we should find it so. Here we are precisely in the situation that suits us ; the people, the manners, the perfect liberality of feeling on all points. In short, we wish—I mean Maria and myself—we wish to stay here ; and that being the case, I can see no reasonable cause for our going. I do not wish to say anything severe to you—quite the contrary ! I have a great regard for you ; and it is

exactly for that reason that I so strongly advise your immediately setting off for Australia."

All this was spoken without any appearance of violence or ill-humour, and, as far as tone went, had every appearance of being a very reasonable remonstrance. Edward appeared to think it so, for he replied to it in the same temperate and reflective manner.

"I am fully aware of all the advantages you allude to, Agatha," he said, "and value them as much as you do. When I was at school I used to hear a great deal about the glories of Rome, and I am now ready to give my testimony to its being the most glorious place upon earth for people of fashion like ourselves, who have a proper value for princes and princesses, and all that sort of thing. But let people say what they will, Agatha, about living here for *nothing*, that phrase, I do assure you, does not refer the least in the world to debts of honour. As to tradesmen, the letting their bills rest in peace as long as you possibly can, is, of course, all plain sailing and fair play; and those who best understand the keeping up their credit by showing themselves off side by side with those who throw about their tin freely, can carry on the war the longest. But liberal as you truly say Rome is, I happen to know, my dear, that the women and the men hang together like bees when the question is about cutting a fellow that can't pay his play-debts. Take my word for it, that my setting off to Australia won't rub out the blot, and that if you persist in staying here, you and Maria will find yourselves walking tête-à-tête on the shady side of the hedge."

Agatha listened to him in gloomy silence. Though not quite so well informed upon the subject as himself, she greatly feared that his statement respecting this one exception in the liberal code of Rome was only too correct; and her "fine spirit" was so completely overwhelmed by the idea that she was about to be dragged away, and actually forced to turn her back upon all the thrones, principalities, and powers, which she so fondly loved and so devoutly revered, that she sank back upon the sofa in an agony of tears. At that moment a heavy cloud did indeed seem to settle itself upon the Roberts race, for not one of them appeared to have sufficient vigour left to make a noise. Mr. Roberts senior was pretty nearly fast asleep in his own little room, with his empty brandy-and-water glass standing on the table before him. His wife stood exactly where Vincent's last entrance and exit had found and left her. Her hands were firmly clasped together, her brows knit, and her eyes fixed upon the ground. Their son remained opposite to her, and having ceased to speak, he had crossed his arms upon his chest, and stood, if not exactly "at ease," yet affecting to look so as well as he could, while he waited with a sort of dogged patience for what was to be said or done next. Maria was still on her knees, but her head and arms were now supported

on a chair ; and from it proceeded a low and very dismal sobbing, which several gentlemen, if they had heard and understood it, ought to have thought exceedingly flattering. This gloomy state of things lasted for several minutes, but was at last interrupted by Agatha, who, suddenly rousing herself, exclaimed, "Tell me at once, both of you—you, ma'am, and Edward, I mean—what is the sum that would bring us clear at once from all debts, gambling, tradesmen, and all?"

The abrupt manner of this appeal startled the whole party, and the two she had particularly addressed seemed to rouse themselves in order to give her an answer. But there was apparently something either difficult or disagreeable in doing so, for they both hesitated.

"What is the good," said Edward, "of tormenting one's memory about every nap that may be owing up and down this confounded place? You will be asking us next, I suppose, how much we left unpaid at Paris. What is the good of it, Agatha?"

"No good in the world," replied her mother for her. "Upon that point I certainly know better than any of you, for I have not forgotten the last scene I had when I got your father to draw for the money for Edward's running off with Bertha."

"My father did not then know how desperate our condition was," replied Agatha, with a little of her former stately decision of manner. "Let him now be told the whole truth, without any mitigation or disguise whatever. Let him be made to understand that we must all run away in the middle of the night, and never be able to lift up our heads afterwards, if he does not at once sell out of the funds, or draw out of the bank, whichever it may be, as many thousands as will be necessary to get us all perfectly clear. When this is done, we shall be able to look about us; and I have no doubt in the world that we shall then be able to go out again as well, or rather, I ought to say, a great deal better than ever. Will you undertake to manage this, ma'am?"

"No, Agatha, I will not," replied Mrs. Roberts, in a manner so decided as to leave no hope of shaking her resolution. "I know the state of your father's mind better than you do, and I positively refuse to make any such proposal to him."

"Then if you won't, I will," said the young lady, springing to her feet with a degree of vivacity which showed that her confidence in her own powers was reviving. "If," she added, "if you would let me know the amount required, it would be more convenient, and so you will both find, if I happen to bring you rather less than you want."

"Less than two thousand pounds would not be worth having, for my share of the business," cried Edward, boldly, as he saw her moving towards the door.

"Very well," replied his sister, composedly, "that shall be the sum I shall ask for; but it might be better for me to state how

much of this is for debts of honour, and how much for trades-people."

"One fourth of the sum," said he, "would let me clear of the world, if my losses were paid."

"And for you, ma'am," resumed Agatha, "I presume that about two or three hundred would suffice?"

"Mercy on me! No, indeed it would not, Agatha!" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, suddenly recovering herself, as it seemed, from the astonishment which had kept her silent. "Not a farthing less than seven or eight hundred would do me any good, if you mean for a regular paying up of everything. If you are really in earnest, Agatha, in trying what you can do by way of getting a tolerably large sum at once, it will be best to put ours at one thousand; for a hundred or two can make no real difference at such a time, and this would leave us a little mite of ready money, which would be a real blessing to us all."

"Very well, ma'am," said the self-elected nuncio, composedly. "I will take your estimate at one thousand, and Edward's at two, and trust I may be able to succeed for both."

"If you do," cried Mrs. Roberts, lifting up her hands and eyes, "I shall be ready to declare that you are the most wonderful creature that ever lived. Away with you, Agatha! We shall neither of us be able to breathe, I think, till you come back again!"

"But, Agatha! Agatha!" cried Maria, raising her head from the chair, "do you hope to manage so as for us to go to the ball to-night?"

"If I succeed at all, Maria, you may go where you will, not only to-night, but for a pretty tolerably long number of nights afterwards. I do not intend to do the thing by halves, I promise you."

Having said this, the young lady walked with a stately and assured step towards the door, but was stopped on the threshold by her mother's calling to her.

"Stay one moment, Agatha," she said. "Remember, my dear, that your poor papa thinks that Edward and Bertha are run off together, for I told him so. You will have to begin by setting him right about that."

"Very well, ma'am," again responded Miss Agatha, "that will be but a trifle among all the rest of it." And having so said with rather a sardonic sort of smile, she bowed her head and left the room.

CHAPTER LV.

MISS AGATHA, as she expected, found her father dozing in happy ignorance of the important crisis at which the affairs of his family had arrived. And also, as she expected, he looked at her with an air of very great astonishment, when, having roused him from his slumbers, she informed him that she had something important to communicate to him.

"You, my dear?" he replied, with a very kind paternal smile. "Then I guess it must be something very agreeable, Agatha. For of late, Heaven help me! I have never had anything important said to me that was not disagreeable; but it was always your poor dear mother that said it. But now I hope the good news is really beginning, for even *she* told me something this morning that I was by no means sorry to hear, about your brother Edward. And now, as I take it, Agatha, you are come to tell me something either about Maria or yourself—which is it, my dear?"

"The news I have to tell you, sir, is of a very different kind," replied Agatha, solemnly; "and is, I am sorry to say, of a nature as far as possible from being agreeable. In the first place, sir, it is absolutely necessary that I should confess to you, that I am convinced we have all been mistaken in supposing my poor mother was a good manager. I have now discovered facts which convince me of the contrary; and it is this which has determined me to come to you, in order to explain fully the situation of your affairs, of which I am quite convinced you are almost entirely ignorant."

"God bless my soul, my dear child, you don't say so!" said the old gentleman, looking rather better pleased and rather less astonished than might have been expected. "Well, to be sure! who would have thought it? And yet, Agatha, I won't deny, my dear, that I have sometimes had a little misgiving about her being so very clever as to money matters as she always said she was. However, Agatha, if she deceived herself in this, it was only a mistake, you know, and not her fault. Poor dear Sarah! only to think of my notions proving right after all! But at any rate, my dear, it is a comfort that your brother has made such a great match. It is a blessing that he is provided for, because I can do the more for you and Maria."

"There, again, sir, my mother has made some most extraordinary blunder. Edward is now in the house, having come back from his ridiculous expedition with the news that Miss Harrington had run away from him with a priest."

"This is the worst news of all," said the poor old man, looking a good deal more rational and a good deal more miserable than when the conversation began. "We have then lost Miss Harrington as a boarder, and Edward has not got her as a wife?"

"Exactly so," replied Agatha. "And now, sir, do you think you are sufficiently composed to hear and understand the statement I am come to make of the real condition of your family affairs?"

By *composed*, Agatha probably meant *sober*, and she immediately perceived that when her father quietly answered *yes*, he spoke the truth.

The species of imbecility into which he had been for some time sinking, had a considerable mixture of wilfulness in it. He had found himself so miserable, poor man! in watching the waning state of his affairs, that he sought relief in ceasing to watch them

any longer, and his brandy-and-water system was, to a great degree, a matter of calculation. He did not wish to lose his senses every day from intoxication, but he did wish to become indifferent and forgetful. The tête-à-tête interviews with his wife, which invariably ended by his being obliged to draw for more money, had long become the bane of his existence; and he now felt the interference of his daughter as a relief, and if it was necessary that he should hear of more troubles, he greatly preferred listening to them from a new quarter. Taking advantage, therefore, of the readiness with which he seemed disposed to listen to her, Agatha related to him the whole of her brother's adventures, including his unfortunate attempt at elopement, his heavy losses at the gaming-table, and his numerous debts to tradesmen. She then went on to state, without any attempt at disguise or mitigation, the condition of the family credit; and concluded by asking him whether he did not think that the best thing he could do under the circumstances would be to redeem the whole family from utter disgrace by at once liquidating all claims upon them. This done, she said, he might save them all from future risk of similar embarrassments, by letting her take the management of everything relating to money. "Try this scheme, my dear father," she said, in conclusion, "and you will find that you are not ruined yet." There was something so new in being thus talked to by his daughter, who had never before addressed so many words to him on any subject, that he listened to her with the deepest attention; and when she had concluded, he got up, kissed her on the forehead, told her that he was very much obliged to her, and that he should take into consideration every word she had said.

This general assurance, however, was not enough to satisfy the anxious mind of Miss Agatha, and she confessed that she was determined not to leave him till he had told her whether it was his intention that all his family should be disgraced or not.

"Agatha," replied the old gentleman, with more firmness of voice and manner than she expected from him, "it is decidedly my intention that they should not."

This was enough. His daughter took a most affectionate leave of him, begged him to go to bed and compose himself, and promised that a list of all their debts should be furnished to him in the course of the following day.

She then returned very triumphantly to the anxious party she had left in the drawing-room, when it was quickly decided that the ladies should immediately dress for the ball. Mr. Edward, however, declined accompanying them, confessing that he should have more pleasure in meeting his particular friends after his accounts with them were settled, than before.

Having thus relieved the most important personages of my narrative from the terror of losing what they considered as a very

important ball, I may with a safe conscience bestow a few moments upon poor little Bertha Harrington, who, though by no means a prodigy of youthful wisdom, was not without some sterling good qualities. It is not necessary to relate all the particulars of her escape with the worthy curé at full length. It must suffice to say, that under his protection she not only reached the convent of the Santa Consolazione in safety, but was fortunate enough immediately to obtain a hearing from Father Maurice, who undertook to take charge of her till he could place her under the protection of the relation she had named. A mild-looking old man was commissioned to find her a bed, and supply all her wants, and from him she learned that the guilty but penitent Mademoiselle Labarre survived the interview she had had with her but a few hours. When the venerable Father Maurice came to her on the following morning, desiring to know in what manner he could serve her, Bertha certainly startled him a little by giving him to understand that all she wished or wanted was to be conveyed immediately to the most fashionable hotel in Rome, for the purpose of putting herself under the protection of a gentleman who was her cousin. During the interval of a few moments, the good priest sat with his eyes fixed on the floor, and his chin supported in his hand, pondering on what it would be most righteous to do under the circumstances; and, fortunately for Bertha, he decided upon letting her have her way. As to pausing to describe the feelings of Vincent as he saw her ushered into the sitting-room which he occupied with his young pupil (who was, however, fortunately absent), it is quite out of the question. I can only say that Father Maurice having been dismissed with grateful thanks by both, and such a donation for the use of the poor as convinced him that they must be very excellent young people, these strangely situated and hitherto unacknowledged lovers came to an explanation which made them rather happier than they seemed to think they ought to be under such very embarrassing circumstances. Vincent, in truth, felt that the delicate forbearance which had hitherto prevented the avowal of his affection had already plunged the object of it into dangers and difficulties from which he might have saved her; and with such a conviction on his mind, it was not very likely he should persevere in a line of conduct which was still likely to prove as dangerous as it was painful. In short, before their interview ended, by Bertha being put in the quietest room that could be found for her use, it was decided between them that by far the most discreet, and in every way the most proper thing they could do, would be to adopt the scheme attempted by Mr. Edward Roberts—in plain English, to run away together to Naples, which Vincent believed to be the nearest place at which they could be married. And I too am clearly of opinion that it *was* by far the best thing they could do.

Nor had they ever cause to doubt the wisdom of the measure. Their journey to Castle Harrington after their marriage was as

rapid as it could be without inconvenience ; and Bertha found her father too ready to confess his own faults, and too happy at finding that the still worse suspicions which attached to him were removed from the mind of his daughter for ever, to be at all disposed to quarrel with the means which restored her to him. He received Vincent too as he deserved to be received—which is equivalent to saying that he could not be received better ; and as the repentant baronet never married again, he grew more firmly attached, with every passing year, to the man who not only made his daughter the happiest woman in the world, but who, in succeeding to his title and estates, transmitted them to his almost worshipped grandson.

CHAPTER LVI.

CONCLUSION.

It was very evident to Mrs. Roberts, that whatever might have been the nature of the conversation between her husband and their eldest daughter, the former had been apparently made a new being by it. The accounts of every kind, including those of his dashing son, were furnished him according to the promise of Agatha ; and greatly to the delight and not a little to the surprise of Mrs. Roberts and her offspring, the old gentleman drew, and himself negotiated, a draft upon his London bankers, which exceeded by exactly two hundred pounds the whole amount—exclusive, however, of the young gentleman's debts of honour. With his own hand he paid every bill, and into his own pocket-book he put every receipt ; and then he gave notice that he wished to say a few words to all his family together.

These words were really very few, considering the importance of them, and they were to this effect :—In the first place, he addressed his son, and told him, with a sort of quiet steadfastness that carried conviction with it, that he never would pay a single shilling towards liquidating his debts of honour.—The young man's only remonstrance was uttered in these words : “ Then, sir, neither I nor any of my family can ever show ourselves in society again.”—To which his father replied, “ So much the better, Edward. However, as far as the society of Rome is concerned, it matters very little, one way or the other, for I do not purpose remaining here more than four-and-twenty hours longer. God forgive me for all the weakness I have shown ! I will do the best I can now to remedy the mischief. I have eaten into my little fortune to the amount of four thousand five hundred pounds ; and that is not the worst of it. My late partner tells me, in his last letter, that my repeated drafts upon the capital left in the business, and for which they stipulated to give me four per cent. interest, have led them to think that it will be better to pay off the loan ; so that for the

future I shall only get about three per cent. interest in the funds. My income, therefore, will be but a small one ; but, such as it is, it will for the future be spent in England."

Had Mr. Roberts said that he "hoped" it would be spent in England, or that he should "wish it might be spent in England," or had he used any phrase whatever which left an opening for an *if*, he probably would have failed in his purpose altogether, for he would have been assailed on all sides with such torrents of argument to prove that he was wrong, as must, in all probability, have overwhelmed him ; but his absolute style of pronouncing the words "*it will*," settled the business at once, and before eight-and-forty hours had passed over their heads from the time that Miss Agatha undertook the affair, the Roberts family were packed into a veterino carriage as snugly and as helplessly as so many cats in a basket, and pursuing the road to Civita Vecchia, from whence they immediately proceeded by water to Marseilles, and on through France to England.

It was not without a strong exertion of firmness and resolution that poor Mr. Roberts achieved all this. His brandy-and-water was given up, and all his former habits of deference for his clever wife entirely broken through ; so that by the time he had settled his family in a small lodging in London, he fell sick, and very soon after his indignant wife thought he was ill enough to justify her sending for a doctor, he died.

This event, however, did not find him wholly unprepared. He had prayed very earnestly to be forgiven for the weakness which had occasioned so much mischief, and he had made his will.

Almost immediately after his death, Mr. Edward "took his proportion like the prodigious son," and set off, in the hope of increasing it, to the United States of America.

And now any one who may think it worth their while to ascertain the subsequent adventures of the ladies of the family, will be sure to hear of them either at Cheltenham, Brighton, or Leamington, as they constantly move about from one to the other of these gay resorts, amusing every one whom they can get to listen to them with the brilliant history of the delightful year they spent abroad. Their three little incomes joined together enable them (to use their own phrase) "to keep up an appearance," but unfortunately neither of the young ladies seems likely to marry ; and as the necessity of fine dresses, in all the various branches of the Roberts family, increases with increasing years, they all find themselves occasionally obliged to take up a little principal money, and hitherto the great facility which attends the disposing of funded property in England has prevented their ever having been arrested for debt.

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